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**Influence of Deployment on the Returning Student Veteran to a
Four Year Institution**

by

Gary J. Nierengarten

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of St. Cloud State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

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In Higher Education Administration

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Dissertation Committee:
Steven McCullar, Chairperson
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Abstract

The impact of deployment on the returning student veteran to a four-year institution is unknown to the majority of the general population. With less than 5% of the population having served in the military and even fewer of those deployed overseas for greater than one year, it can be expected that there is little research on this topic at this institution of higher education. The purpose of the narrative inquiry qualitative research study is to fill the knowledge void and add to the current literature. The research participants are current or former students (graduates) within the last ten years, whose academic programs were interrupted at least once by a military deployment. These student veterans includes current and alumni undergraduate and graduate students. The theoretical framework used for this study was Transition 2.0: A Theoretical Critique of Tinto's Model for Exploring Student-Veteran Persistence. This research utilized the narrative inquiry method to gain the lived experiences of the research participants. The sample consisted of 9 participants from an upper Midwest regional state university. Interviews were recorded and later analyzed using NVivo Software; interview notes supplemented transcripts for non-verbal messaging. Analysis of the participant narratives identified three themes that support the Theoretical Framework presented above: Goals/Commitments, Institutional Commitment, and Development and Integration. Student-veterans shared their experiences and thoughts about how they felt as students returning to the same institution regarding academics, fellow students, and the administrative processes. In summary, all participants reported a positive experience with suggestions for improvements. There are several practical recommendations to improve the institution's effort to attract and retain a larger number of student-veterans, which are discussed in detail within the text. Suggestions for further research would address the geographic limitations of the study. The current study was confined to students who are either currently enrolled or who have already persisted through degree completion at a single upper Midwest state university. Future studies could include intermittent students, those on academic probation, and those who did not persist, as well as a more racially diverse group of participants.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all the student veterans, that they achieve success in their studies and gain an improved quality of life, while not forgetting those veterans who have been wrongfully denied these benefits they deservedly earned. The objective of this study is to bring to light their issues in a format consistent to academic requirements and existing student veteran theories to faculty and administration in hopes that this knowledge may benefit future student veterans, who unlike any other student segment, may have the greatest number of distractions in their progression toward a degree.

Acknowledgements

As a first-generation college graduate, I would like to thank those who have guided me in this research project. To my Advisor and Committee Chairperson Dr. Steven McCullar, and to the other committee members Dr. Jennifer Jones, Dr. Rachel Friedensen, and Dr. Corbin Smyth. A special thanks to all the other professors that I have worked with in this program, including Dr. Michael Mills, Dr. Christine Imbra, Dr. Krista Soria, and Dr. Brittany Williams. I am forever grateful for your academic guidance. To my doctoral classmates of HIED Cohort 11, and not to forget the staff the Saint Cloud State University Institutional Review Board.

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To the family members. My late father, a World War II veteran who was not able to use his GI Bill. My late mother, who at the age of 11 who was forced to drop out of school due to her father's untimely death, and sent out to work at a neighboring farm to give her wages to support her mother and siblings on the farm. Who finally at age 44, earned her GED, and on more than

one occasion said “you are never too old to learn,” and insisted her children pursue their educations. My sisters Carol, Jane, Mary, and Sharon for their efforts of guidance that finally paid off. Most notably my brother. Dennis Nierengarten DDS, a fellow student-veteran of this institution, for his mentorship, academic guidance, and career advice over the five decades. I could not have accomplished this without you. Last, but certainly not least, my wife Carol whose constant intercession made this possible, and finally our adult children Peter and Laura.

Forward

On the opening of the Minnesota Historical Society's *Minnesota's Greatest Generation* exhibit on May 20, 2009, Project Advisory Committee Chair, General John W. Vessey, Jr. addressed a group of Society friends on the topic of the "greatest" generation, and that generation's impact on America as we know it today.

An excerpt from General John W. Vessey: *Remembering and Reflecting*

In 1944, a few weeks after D-Day in Normandy, President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly called the GI Bill. It provided 52 weeks of unemployment insurance, some home ownership assistance, and educational help and incentives for honorably discharged veterans. The war was far from over, then, but Roosevelt could foresee an ending, and the possibility of discharging 16 million young males into an economy that didn't have jobs for them. The GI Bill passed the Congress by a very narrow margin. Most of the opposition came from those who thought 52 weeks of \$20 weekly unemployment insurance would induce sloth, and from higher education leaders who were convinced it would dilute our university education system fatally.

When the war ended with an Allied victory, the Veterans came home, and many used the various benefits of the GI Bill. Over 50% used the education benefits. Two years after the war ended 49% of college admissions were veterans. By 1950 the nation had more than tripled the number of people with baccalaureate or higher degrees. By the time the WWII Vets eligibility expired, the United States had gained 450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, and 67,000 medical doctors, and millions schooled in other professions and trades. The nation had become one of widespread home ownership. Thousands of successful new businesses had been started.

For America, whatever the education portion of that \$14.5 billion GI Bill investment was, it was probably the most transforming investment the US Congress ever approved. It abundantly raised the education level of the population, and it profoundly altered the university education system of the Nation. Those newly educated WWII Veterans became the scientists, medical doctors, lawyers, educators, business leaders, and political leaders who led our Nation and the world through the last half of the Twentieth Century. Remember, these were the people whose average educational level was one year of high school when they entered service. Further, they were the parents of the "Boomers," a generation that continued to move toward an even higher level of education. By 2003, over 40 million Americans had baccalaureate or higher university educations. Although it took some years to really understand it and make it work, the experience of the war years also demonstrated that women and ethnic minorities rightfully deserved opportunities to compete for positions of high responsibility. Today the Nation is the beneficiary.

General John W. Vessey
Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff

John W. Vessey, a native of Minneapolis, MN was an advocate of both the enlisted soldier and their education. He began his military service as a Private and climbed to the rank of Four Star General and served as Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff under President Reagan. The Minnesota Army National Guard 34th Infantry Division Headquarters, located in Arden Hills, MN opened in July 2020. The center was appropriately named the General John W. Vessey Readiness Center.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Student veterans face many obstacles that can interfere with their persistence in higher education toward a four-year degree. These obstacles can be both internal and external. For example, a student veteran may lack the motivation or the knowledge to navigate the academic world, and some are just underprepared for the rigor of a college education. The national average for student completion rates is 57%, but for student veterans at similar institutions the completion rate is a shockingly low 3% (Johnson et al., 2014). While the present university system abounds with resources to help student veterans succeed, the low persistence rate does not seem to be influenced by the amount of funding a student veteran receives. Moreover, current research has failed to capture the vastness and diversity of student veterans' experiences, resulting in conflicting research results (Cate, 2014).

Challenges for Student Veterans

Student Veterans' Unique Needs

The needs of student veterans are varied from their peers as well as within their own group. The needs of male and female soldiers are different from each other as well as the needs of soldiers from different minority groups. For example, female veterans might internalize issues instead of communicating their challenges (DiRamio et al., 2015). A female student veteran may face unique health issues from deployment that are difficult for civilians to understand (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). By comparison, research finds that male student veterans are less likely to report issues with alcohol and are more likely to have issues with chemical abuse later in life (Barry et al., 2012). Sexual harassment is an ongoing issue in the military that can impede the success of all student veterans upon return to civilian life but impacts female soldiers and male soldiers differently (Kimerling et al., 2007). Student veterans from minority groups might

face additional racial challenges, including unequal treatment in the classroom or by fellow classmates (Blakemore, 2021).

As students of higher education leave to serve as soldiers and then return to complete their education, the events that they experience can have a profound impact on how they see life. Most students have unique challenges in pursuing their goals in higher education, but student veterans face problems that are not clearly understood by those who have not lived the experiences of a student veteran (Ryan et al., 2011). This lack of shared experiences may lead to frustration, low academic performance, and lower possibility of persistence for the student veteran. There is no panacea to address the varied backgrounds and individual uniqueness of each student veteran; however, with an understanding of their unique perspectives and experiences, one can better understand and assist the student veteran through this stage of their educational journey. The current study focused on the unique experiences of student veterans, which included military indoctrination, military duties, deployment experiences, depression induced from experienced episodes, transitions from deployment, academic re-adjustment, and relationships with fellow students and faculty.

Student Veterans Exploited for Profits

For-profit schools have been identified as having overall low completion rates, underemployment of graduates, and tuition rates nearly four times the cost of a community college (Snyder et al., 2016). In spite of this, for-profit schools aggressively and successfully recruit student veterans (Appel & Taylor, 2015; Hall et al., 2020) because a student veteran can draw a guaranteed income stream for the institution through generous GI Bill awards (Kutz, 2010). In light of known lower outcomes for profit-based schools, it is unclear why students choose this pathway (Cellini & Koedel, 2017).

Another area where student veterans are heavily recruited is by institutions that lack accreditation (Salemme, 2017). These institutions brag about high graduation rates of student veterans, yet many of their graduates find themselves unemployable at the completion of their programs. The educational programming offered by an unaccredited institution often fails to meet occupational standards. This lack of certification yields a diploma or certificate that is considered worthless by those outside of the school (Deming et al., 2012).

Transitions from Deployment

Adjustments to Authority Figures. Many student veterans find the transition from being an active-duty military person to a successful student difficult. The transition involves moving from an environment that is highly structured to one of complete freedom. The abrupt absence of structure and a regimented schedule is a difficult adjustment and can be overwhelming to those who are not prepared (Briggs, 2012; Hart & Thompson, 2013; Olsen et al., 2014). Student veterans also face uncomfortable transitions in their leadership relationships as they shift from taking orders from commanders to taking instruction from faculty (Blaauw-Hara, 2017; DiRamio et al., 2008). Military leaders are concise, brief, and often perceived as non-social by junior enlisted personnel when they attempt to communicate with commanders (DiRamio, 2011). In contrast, many professors are less formal and expect discussion with their students where this contrast can often produce conflict.

When returning to the academy, student veterans are reluctant to approach their faculty with questions or concerns. These hesitations may lead to problems in their coursework. The student veteran-to-faculty relationship can be hampered from differences of military opinion. Some faculty have more conflicting viewpoints, as well as not understanding each other's values (DiRamio et al., 2008), and at times student veterans brush up against faculty with conflicting

values, such as military actions, government entitlement programs, and immigration. Some faculty members, who are veterans themselves, may or may not have a liberal viewpoint.

Adjustment to Classmates and Peers. One part of the transition process is that of socialization with peers. Many student veterans have matured well beyond their years through exposure to military actions. Student veterans are known to have difficulty socializing and may exhibit a lower level of patience with their peers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Wurster et al., 2013). Student veterans who are now in the classroom with traditional aged students might view their peers as less engaged or even as immature. Some student veterans have experienced the atrocities of war and have difficulty relating to those who have not. This mismatch of worldview and maturity can create a less than ideal academic setting for all students.

Sense of Belonging and Mattering at the Institution

Research has found that student veterans often believe their institutions do not understand them or their unique needs (Cook & Kim, 2009). Without a sense of meaning and belonging, a student loses engagement and focus and the desire to persist. The longer a student is absent, the more the sense of belonging diminishes, and subsequently the desire to maintain enrollment at any institution. The overall lack of student veterans' attainment of a four-year degree at a particular institution may be perceived as a lack of concern from that location for its student veterans (Anderson et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2006).

Factors Impeding Student Veteran Success

There are numerous factors that impact student veteran success, and one of the main ones is financial stress (Olsen et al., 2014). There is a misperception that student veterans are flush with cash since their benefits from the GI Bill include educational funding for tuition, a housing

allowance, and a smaller stipend for books (Norman et al., 2015). However, once school and housing costs are covered, there is little left for transportation or for food. If a student veteran drops credits and falls below full-time status, they are required to pay back the Veterans Administration for a proportional amount or a complete refund if all credits are dropped (U.S. Veterans Administration, 2021). Failing a class along with the subsequent reduction of benefits places additional stress on the academically and financially challenged student veterans. The student veteran also faces a myriad of paperwork applications and approvals. This never-ending stream of paperwork and financial stress can be a challenge to the student veteran that taxes their coping skills.

Another reason why a student veteran may struggle in the classroom is a lack of motivation that can lead to misunderstanding the course requirements or missing assignments (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Norman et al., 2015). This lack of understanding may in fact be that the work expectations exceed the student's level of knowledge or understanding. Another factor affecting motivation is the challenge of the Corona Virus-19 (Covid-19) where classes were moved to an on-line only delivery and some institutions closed their doors (Shane, 2020). Unexpected shifts in pedagogy may affect student veterans who are accustomed to routine and desire face-to-face instruction; this may lead to further delays in program completion.

Lastly, deployments are out of control for the student veterans. Student veterans who are members of the National Guard or Reserves (Bauman, 2009) can expect their education to be interrupted by deployments. These students may be deployed for over a year at time and may be deployed more than once in their six-year enlistment. If a faculty member is not supportive or accommodating, the student veteran may earn a failing grade or drop out as a stop-loss and never

return (Borsari, 2018). The current study specifically examined what effect a deployment has on student veterans and their re-enrollment and persistence in college.

I personally was afforded the experience of higher education through the GI Bill. The odds of my success were low. I was a first-generation student, had low secondary academic performance, had a weak locus of control, and was unaware of the expectations of academic rigor. This combination of factors nearly led to personal failure in completion of higher education. Through my research, I identified key factors that helped student veterans persist despite the well-documented obstacles. I intend to utilize this research for future student veterans so that they may attain a quality of life afforded by higher education.

Statement of the Problem

The six-year graduation rate for student veterans is lower than that of traditional students (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Cate, 2014). This low rate has numerous contributing factors including issues of academic preparedness of the student, motivation, re-adjustments from war zone conditions during deployments, and the self-efficacy of the student (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Some students speak of the difficulties in enrollment in respect to their return from deployment is not in sync with the academic year. Other students speak of a retention loss in making the return to advanced course work in the sciences difficult before and after a one- or two-year deployment.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this Narrative Inquiry research was to study the experiences and effects of deployment on the student veteran returning to higher education to identify strategies and potential improvements to improve persistence and completion rates of student veterans. The findings are significant as they have the potential to improve graduation rates of student veterans.

In turn, the results of this study will prepare these individuals for positions in professional programs and areas of leadership in society, as well as contribute to the broader knowledge base in society. Further discussion is presented in Chapter 2.

Assumptions of the Study

There were several assumptions of this study that were expected to be true. The first was that the participants would provide answers that are honest and true. It was assumed that the participants would allow themselves to describe in great detail their personal experiences spanning their own individual time frames. The second assumption was that the indirect compensation of \$50 would not alter participants' desire to participate or impact the subjects' ability to provide honest answers free of bias. The third assumption was that the participants of the study might not be a representative sample of student veterans nor reflect the entire student veteran population.

Purpose Statement

The current study examined possible effects of war-time activities in war zones that may affect academic performance of student veterans. Participants were student veterans who completed at least one tour of duty (deployment) in a hostile zone and later re-entered a four-year institution. There is an absence of qualitative or quantifiable studies examining self-perceived differences in thought or actions that impact the academic performance of this specific group of volunteers. It is generally difficult to quantify, yet through the lens of the student veteran, the issues became apparent.

This study focused on the student veterans at a single Midwest regional state university. The volunteers who agreed to participate were the participants of this study. A narrative inquiry qualitative research method was used to capture the experiences of the student veteran

participants. The narrative inquiry was the preferred method to capture detailed descriptions (Patton, 2014), and that level of detail was needed for further analysis. The method and processes are described further in Chapter 3.

Research Question

The research questions intended to elicit and garner qualitative data from the research participants so that the researcher could envision the unique difficulties faced by student veterans. The current study examined the following two questions:

RQ1: What influence does deployment have on the student veteran returning to higher education?

RQ2: What has the institution done for the student veteran to help them reach their educational goals?

Delimitations

This study had numerous limitations, including addressing gaps in existing research of academic performance related to the student veteran. The current study was limited to participants who are active students, which silences student veterans who did not persist and might have provided critical insight into their reasons for leaving academia. Although the participants were representative of the local population, there might be a lack of diversity in this research, including race and gender depending on those who responded as interested participants. Additionally, PTSD is a well-researched and highly-documented area of concern to the student veteran (Elliott et al., 2011). While the intention of the paper was not to become a discussion on the topic of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the topic did arise.

The researcher's status as a student veteran may have reduced the participants' fear of hidden agendas of non-veteran researchers since the researcher is also part of their marginalized

group (Vicars, 2012). The researcher did not seek this research project as a means to denigrate fellow students, faculty and staff, or the attending institution. That said, the current research study assumed the research subjects would provide honest answers.

There is now recognition that mental health issues that emerge from the battlefield may also impact the families of the student veteran. Although the focus of this study examined student veterans who return to higher education from a battlefield deployment, it did not recognize those with multiple deployments. The lack of dwell time (time between deployments) may lead to a reduced resilience, which in turn may lead to chemical dependency, increase of PTSD symptoms, and suicide (Rudd et al., 2011). All of these impact positive academic performance.

Key Terms

Adult Learner: Nontraditional college students have been identified as “adults beginning or continuing their enrollment as college students at a later-than-typical age” (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 26).

First Generation: Often defined as (a) a student with two parents, neither of whom attended college; (b) a student whose parents completed associate but not bachelor’s degrees; or (c) a student whose parents attended but did not complete college. Regardless of how first generation is defined, students who had parent(s) with no college experience “faced a greater deficit than those with at least one parent graduating from college” (Toutkoushian et al., 2018, p. 28).

Forever GI Bill, Post 9/11), aka. Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act:

Specifically, for those who joined the military after September 11, 2001. The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education, housing, and book allowance for current

service members (active duty, Reserves, or National Guard) who have 90 days or more service, active-duty recipients who have ended their term of service, and discharged veterans who received an Honorable Discharge and served at least 90 days. The benefits are based on active duty served up to 36 months and are now deemed lifetime and fully transferable to family members (dependents) (U.S. Veterans Administration, 2020a).

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): The World Trade Center and Pentagon were attacked by al Qaeda terrorists on September 11, 2001. On October 7, 2001, the U.S. Armed Forces initiated combat operations to include the search and destroy mission of those in control of al Qaeda (Institute of Medicine, 2014).

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): This operation was initiated in 2003 to overthrow the Iraqi government. The OIF ended in 2011 and transitioned into a peace keeping mission renamed Operation New Dawn (Institute of Medicine, 2014).

Persistence: One form of motivation that the student must be willing to expend when faced with challenges to reach their educational goal (Tinto, 1975).

Student Veteran: A student veteran is a student who is a “current or former member of the Active-Duty Military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience or legal status as a veteran” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 107).

Summary

The goal of this research project was to understand the effects of deployment and the unique experiences of student veterans to minimize the possibility of the student veteran failing to reach their educational goals. Academic grades and persistence may define success in this study as it supports persistence. Veterans, support organizations, or institutions may utilize the knowledge generated from this study to increase interest of prospective student veterans for

higher education and better their understanding of current student veteran populations.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a better pathway for student veterans to experience success in their academic journeys after they have served our country.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to understand student veterans, a review of the past is in order. The plight of the veteran has evolved from the earliest days of educational support. It has long been recognized by the Federal Government that an educational benefit is necessary for those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Each war or conflict, different presidential administrations, and oscillations of public support have all impacted the legacy of providing educational opportunities for veterans. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, in 2018 there were 894,000 veterans and their family members' benefitting from the GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017; 2019). Chapter 2 addresses the relevant history, the student veteran prior to military service, and their return to school. Chapter 2 begins with examining education benefits for veterans within a historical context and concludes by examining the models leading to success of the current student veteran.

The GI Bill of Rights

History of the GI Bill

Research places the origin of the relationship between the military and higher education firmly in the seventeenth century. President Thomas Jefferson put in place plans for a national military school. West Point, located at the first fort of the Continental Army, officially opened on July 4, 1802 (Mui, 2017). West Point opened as a civil engineering school with the purpose to educate military leaders (United States Military Academy, n.d.). The Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862 further reinforced the formal relationship between higher education and the military. The Act mandated military training be part of the curriculum at institutions financed by the Act, including the direction of the government to enable colleges and universities to educate armed forces personnel (Rumann, 2010). The National Defense Acts of 1916 (amended 1933) and 1920

established the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and the modern National Guard (Livingston et al., 2011). Early on, a pathway for higher education was established for current service members, but it did not exist for former service members.

World War I. Educational benefits were not offered to veterans of World War I. In 1932, tens of thousands of disgruntled WWI veterans faced a lack of jobs and lack of prospects when they returned from war and the nation plunged into the Great Depression (McArdle, 2017). In protest, veterans created encampments called Hoovervilles in Washington D.C. to protest directly to President Hoover (McArdle, 2017; Thelin, 2011). The insurrection was quelled, but it paved the way for important changes to come in providing benefits to U.S. veterans. In 1936, despite resistance from President Roosevelt, Congress approved bonuses for veterans of World War I (McArdle, 2017).

World War II. The Service Man's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, was the beginning of real benefits for returning servicepersons. As part of the Bill, veterans would receive an unemployment transition allowance of \$20 per week for up to 52 weeks (Greenberg, 1997). The unemployment allowance was the beginning of a formalized payment system to aid veterans in transition to a civilian career and lifestyle.

Educational benefits for veterans saw significant change in 1945 as a way to address the massive unemployment following the United States' victory of World War II and to maintain social order. Because President Roosevelt feared another "Hooverville" incident, he worked to address the problem of millions of returning soldiers with no job prospects (Thelin, 2011). Despite the legislation marginally passing, every soldier would now have access to a formal education grant on return from service (Kiestler, 1994; Turner & Bound, 2003). Veterans of war who met specific qualifications would receive an education benefit guarantee of a \$500 annual

payment for four years to pursue formal education or training (Thelin, 2011). Service Man's Readjustment Act of 1944 was an important shift in terms of institutions recognizing this unique group of students and of the government providing additional benefits.

Additional changes in the 1944 Act provided veterans a monthly stipend while attending any school on a full-time basis for up to five academic years (Angrist & Chen, 2011; Bennett, 1996; Boulton, 2005; Mattila, 1978; Ottley, 2014). However, the GI Bill of 1944 did little to improve the lives of the African American veteran (Turner & Bound, 2003). For the 1.2 million African Americans who served in segregated units, the benefits were structured in such a way that few were able to benefit from them (Blakemore, 2021). One stipulation was that the benefit expired if not used within ten years. The expiration of benefits and persistent poverty that required African American veterans to enter the workforce immediately upon return from deployment instead of enrolling in school caused many African American veterans to miss out on these opportunities (Herbold, 1994). Additionally, African Americans were denied entry to notable universities and were instead directed to nearby Historically Black Colleges and Universities if they were directed anywhere at all.

Korean War. The Korean War was not a war but rather a U.S. involved conflict between North and South Korea. The conflict occurred between 1950 and 1953 and led to the Veterans' Readjustment and Assistance Act of 1952 (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). It included an educational component for all veterans who served honorably for greater than 90 days (Bennett, 1996). Veterans were allotted money for education and training for 1.5 times the duration of service for up to 36 months of schooling. The amount of benefit varied by enrollment status and number of dependents, with a maximum of \$160 per month (Stanley, 2003).

Vietnam War. The Vietnam War ushered in an era where enhancements were made to the GI Bill. Payments from the GI Bill increased to reflect inflation (Bennett, 1996). Program benefits were extended to allow a greater use of the benefits. The Vietnam Era GI Bill allowed the qualifying veteran to receive benefits for five academic years instead of four. This allowed the opportunity for student veterans to begin graduate level work. Nearly 50% of the Vietnam era veterans participated in educational benefits (Angrist & Chen, 2011). However, despite student veteran payments exceeding the costs of room and board, there is little evidence to support the belief that the Vietnam era veterans received substantial future earnings premiums over their non-veteran peers (Angrist & Chen, 2011). In fact, research has indicated that lifetime earnings differences between Vietnam-era veterans and non-veterans are likely to be small (Berger & Hirsch, 1983). This data is significant in that research does not indicate improvements in income that generally occur with advances in education.

The Vietnam War revealed other issues for the student veteran that went beyond financing an education. Public opinion, fueled by the media, was against the Vietnam conflict (Darda, 2019). Institutions of higher education were embroiled in student riots protesting the draft. “Draft dodgers” faced imprisonment or fled the United States (Malamud & Wozniak, 2012; Maxwell, 2015). Some draftees who did faithfully serve their country were scorned and labelled as “baby killers” (Desai et al., 2016). The student veterans of the Vietnam War were not welcomed on campus by instructors and students who opposed the war. To bypass the negative stigma, highly qualified veterans avoided this toxic culture and avoided higher education altogether (Summerlot et al., 2009). Those veterans who chose to endure the hostile education environment struggled with a sense of belonging (Boulton, 2005) as they tried to reconcile the

realities experienced in war with the fabricated experiences of those with no military experience (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012).

The research from Vietnam-era veterans is contradictory in terms of whether deployments negatively impacted years of education (Lyons et al., 2006). The Vietnam Era Twin Study of Aging compared 44 sets of twins in which one twin was deployed and the other was not (Lyons et al., 2006). The study found that deployment had a negative impact on years of education attained (Lyons et al., 2006). However, another study by the National Vietnam Veteran Research Study (NVVRS) concluded that deployment did not affect educational goals (Kulka et al., 1990; Vogt et al., 2004). In fact, according to Vogt et al. (2004), the NVVRS was unable to discover any published research on the effect of deployment on educational attainment for returning service members.

In the decades following the Vietnam War, the United States endured the Cold War and several other military actions, and with those came a decrease of governmental emphasis on educational benefits programming for veterans (MacLean, 2005). The use of a military draft ended in 1973, and the U.S. military transitioned into an Armed Forces of all volunteers (Vergun, 2020). In the last three decades, young men and women have enlisted in the armed forces for many reasons: patriotism, a pause in one's life, and educational benefits. Some are compelled to join the military because they face educational challenges. Some young adults seek to pause their careers after high school and use the military as a stop-gap in their lives.

Present GI Bill Requirements

The GI Bill has its own set of requirements that must be met in order to receive GI Bill educational benefits. To receive full educational benefits, the veteran must serve 36 months of active duty (not to include basic or advanced training) or a pro-rated reduction for times less than

36 months (U.S. Veteran Administration, 2020b). Student veterans who served in active Armed Forces or in the Guard and Reserves and were deployed earn time toward the GI Bill.

Additionally, those who serve in the National Guard are eligible for tuition assistance programs with an additional allowance to cover costs at a state funded college or university. After September 11, 2001, an amendment was made for a service-connected disability for a veteran discharged after 30 days of service who received an Honorable Discharge (U.S. Veteran Affairs, 2020b).

Unlike veterans in the past who may have faced financial difficulties while in pursuit of higher education, financial support for today's veteran is at an all-time high (Molina & Morse, 2015). Following September 2001, the Veteran's educational benefits were increased to the point that a veteran now receives more funding than at any other point in history (Miller, 2015). Presently there is a resurgence in policy toward veteran educational benefits. On some college campuses, enrollment of military and student veterans has increased up to 500% since 2009 with an estimated \$36 billion in Post 9/11 entitlements; 84% of this student population begins postsecondary education enrolled in two-year institutions (De La Garza et al., 2016).

Despite increased funding and extended eligibility, student veterans face ongoing challenges of transition from soldier to student, which often evolves into difficulty transitioning from being told what to do to becoming independent thinkers (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2015; Goodman et al., 2006; Molina & Morse, 2015; Summerlot et al., 2009). Each of these young adults faces unique challenges as they become student veterans (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Lifetime Eligibility. The Forever GI Bill was signed by President Donald Trump in 2017 and went into effect in August 2018. According to this bill, education benefits no longer expire. In the past, the GI Bill educational benefits would expire if not used within a time frame of 10

years. The recent change in benefits extension allows veterans the flexibility to use this program over their lifetime as needed (Veterans Affairs, 2020).

Dependent Eligibility. Another notable change to the post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefits was the addition of eligibility of veteran dependents. Those service members who served after 9/11/2001 are now able to transfer their educational benefits to their children or to their spouse (U.S. Veterans Administration, 2021). When a dependent dies, the veteran can choose a new eligible dependent of the veteran to transfer any of the original dependent's remaining eligibility.

Challenges in Post 9/11 Eligibility. Institutions of higher education are seeing a greater enrollment of military personnel who are serving or who have served and are active duty. The veteran enrollment increase is consistent with Farrell's (2005) findings that educational benefits are an important factor in the decision to enlist. It is important to differentiate the two distinct types of student veterans. Student veterans can either be veterans who served full time and were discharged from military service or be currently serving in the military part-time (most likely part of the National Guard or Reserves). This distinction is essential in respect to educational benefits, challenges in persistence, and time to degree completion. The active duty who ended their term of service (ETS) is able to focus on their academics without interference of military commitments, whereas the Guard or Reserve student veterans have weekend drills, annual training, and deployments that can inhibit graduation rates.

The Student Veteran

Student veterans pursue a variety of educational programs and a wide range of degrees: 29% associate, 49% bachelors, 16% masters, and 2% doctoral (Cate, 2014). However, according to Durdella and Kim (2012), the student veteran is more likely to major in the sciences than in

the arts, possibly because the student veterans find themselves attracted to these areas of study from virtue of their military experiences.

The Transition from Veteran to Student Veteran

The Deployment. Research supports that the student veteran has two transitions to make: (a) the transition from service member to civilian, and (b) the transition from civilian to student. In the first transition, research documents the unique hardship experienced as veterans return to social norms (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This difficulty can be expressed in an analogy that most of us can relate to. David Bellefeuille, Director of Education and Employment Programs, MN Department of Veterans Affairs, shares a story in the difficulty service members endure relating to the transition going to and returning from deployment:

Imagine being in a canoe with your family, spouse and/or children on a peaceful calm lake, someone jumps out and the canoe overturns. The remaining members get thrown overboard, have to right the overturned canoe, and struggle to get back in, and travel alone. Upon return from being deployed, the service member falls back into the canoe, everyone is dumped out, everyone struggles to right the canoe, and then to get back in.
(personal interview)

This analogy describes only one such challenge, for student veterans who are parents, yet those closest are the student veteran. Beyond the family there are still challenges in larger groups. For the service member this added hurdle of reintegration into the cultural context of civilian society leaves many confused, misunderstood, and isolated (Demers, 2011). This is further impacted by a loss of structure, camaraderie, and identity that is established while in the military (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Unique Issues to the National Guard and Reserve. With multiple deployments, the returning service member faces unfamiliar surroundings when they return to civilian life. The service member leaves behind a life of order and structure and enters a life absent of structure and returns to a life of freedoms, similar to the environment prior to deployment. For members of the Reserves or National Guard, this line blurs with their education often being interrupted with one or more deployments during their education (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), which is consistent to the six-year voluntary enlistment.

Transition and Health Concerns. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) recognizes that student veterans face transition challenges from a combination of factors including health concerns. Some student veterans either begin or return to civilian life with physical and mental injuries (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). It is not uncommon for the student veteran to have a traumatic brain injury or amputations from injuries resulting from their deployments. Additionally, non-visible injuries may lay dormant and not manifest themselves for years (O'Herrin, 2011; Rattray et al., 2019).

It is common for veterans to have mental health issues resulting from deployments. Of the veterans from OEF/OIF who are not students, 20% report mental health issues (Currier et al., 2018), while nearly 35% of student veterans report severe anxiety, and 24% report severe depression (Rudd et al., 2011). Compared to military conflicts of the past, today's student veterans are returning from the OIF and OEF campaigns and are emerging from a different battlefield. These modern engagements are "boots on the ground" conflicts that are prolonged and extensive. This results in greater risk for physical damage (injuries, environmental conditions, chemical exposure, Traumatic Brain Disorders) and mental health issues associated with PTSD and other invisible injuries (Campbell & Riggs, 2015).

Currier et al. (2018) asserted that student veterans are more critical of and have less confidence in counseling and medication. This finding supports the assumption that veterans avoid mental health assistance as a sign of perceived weakness (Currier et al., 2018). These findings provide evidence that those who are in the greatest need are the least likely to seek mental health treatment (Currier et al., 2018). To minimize impact on academic performance, barriers to mental health care must be identified to address those who are hesitant to seek services (Hoge et al., 2006). These mental health issues support the need for early intervention with education stressing seeking help is acceptable and continual communication with the student veteran as they progress toward their educational goal.

Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a well-documented area of research that identifies that (a) PTSD affects the student veteran and their inability to have meaningful relationships with other students and staff, and (b) it can create difficulties maintaining the intrinsic motivation required for academic success (Norman et al., 2015). The current research project recognizes the abundance of research into the impact of PTSD on student veterans, so further discussion of this topic was excluded from this study.

Institutional and Faculty Support. Research has revealed the importance of faculty member engagement to student veteran success. Faculty interaction with non-student military personalities can have a positive impact on the student veteran experience (Elliot, 2015). According to Gonzalez and Elliott (2016), “Prior contact with the military leads faculty members to get to know student veterans better, which in turn leads to their willingness to help student veterans succeed in the classroom” (p. 35). The method of delivery that an instructor uses, curriculum, and assessment of acquired knowledge can also impact the success of a student veteran, particularly for those student veterans struggling with injury. The University of

Washington assisted in the integration of Universal Design (UD) into the classroom (Burgstahler, 2012). The UD adaption assists those with special needs without compromising the content (Grossman, 2009).

Failures of Transition. Chopik et al. (2020) asserted that Army soldiers can be divided into a resilient class and a declining class. The majority, approximately 60% of soldiers, are resilient, where the balance is about 40% in a persistent low (Chopik et al., 2020). The resilient class has high levels of personal strengths and changes very little in the deployment cycle. The declining class starts with lower personal characteristics and experiences declines post-deployment with no significant gains over time. The academic environment places challenges on the persistent low individuals that may be interpreted as stress adding yet another way they lack success. This supports the earlier findings of Burnett and Segoria (2009).

Relationships with Others

The military culture is an ongoing influence as the student veteran progresses in the academy. The military indoctrination process of teamwork and collective efforts for group perseverance begins immediately upon enlistment. However, within higher education the student veteran now navigates a mostly different culture. Higher education has a different set of values and priorities that places high value on individual differences and individual thinking (Arminio et al., 2015). The cultural incongruity leads to an incongruence for the student veteran between the military and higher education.

Rumann and Hamrick (2010) found student veterans often struggle for a time before they can adapt to a higher education environment. Student veterans find themselves different from the general student body in many ways, which causes friction between the groups of students. Notably in how they perceive the path to reaching a common goal. Another difference is an

ingrained desire for survival that begins early in the enlistment process. From the first day in the military, recruits face indoctrination into a way of life that removes their individuality and rebuilds their identity as part of a team. The military indoctrination creates a high degree of group perseverance, and something all student veterans share. These engrained common objectives in which failure is not an option can be used to the student veterans' advantage if there are opportunities for student veterans to have a sense of belonging with each other (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Because classroom peers do not share this experience with student veterans, both groups of students often have difficulty relating to each other in the classroom (Abes et al., 2007).

The academy views the military as a distinct culture with its own set of social standards (Hall, 2011) as well as the military itself. The military philosophy rejects civilian norms of self and embraces the collective idea of self, which entails a commitment to the fellow soldier and the objective (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This acculturation presents an arduous journey in the transition back to society (Collins, 1998).

Student View of Student Veterans. There are times when the student veteran has difficulties relating with the typical younger students. Student veterans must mature quickly on the battlefield (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger 2014) and as a result might view the traditional student as immature (DiRamio et al., 2008). The mismatch in perceived academic devotion and commitment of the focused student veteran versus a less focused peer who might fail to meet group assignment deadlines, miss group meetings, and fail to complete group project requirements can be a cause of frustration and conflict.

Another area of concern and a potential stressor to the student veteran is how leadership roles are viewed between these two peer groups. The traditional student might view the student

veteran as a natural leader in group assignments, but the student veteran might be completing group tasks out of impatience or higher expectations and standards of performance (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lim et al., 2020).

Academic Spaces and Communities for Student Veterans. Astin (1993) has argued that a peer group is the single most important source of influence, and it is no different for student veterans. Student veterans find solace with fellow student veterans (Summerlot et al., 2009). For this reason, most four-year institutions have designated spaces for student veterans to interact with each other (De La Garza et al., 2016). Institutions also have student veteran organizations on campus like Student Veterans of America (SVA), which is a national organization with local chapters that provide a place for students to turn.

Another level of engagement offered to student veterans is the opportunity to participate in a learning community. A student veteran learning community provides a community where all the students are student veterans who live and study together. This living arrangement offers a more cohesive social model, an opportunity for veterans to academically support one another, and removes the issues of integrating with traditional students in personal spaces (De La Garza et al., 2016). A cohesive social environment helps those student veterans transitioning from having directions every moment of their day and having no freedom in their actions to unbound freedom in their daily activities (DiRamio et al., 2008). A learning community also provides a more intentional daily routine, which is helpful for student veterans who suffer from a lack of structure (Kirchner, 2015).

Mentoring for Student Veterans. Another lesser documented informal means of success for the student veteran couples the friendship of another veteran with that of a mentor. Research has shown that when a student veteran mentors another student, the probability of

success of the mentored student increases (Cass & Hammond, 2015; Dillard & Yu, 2016; Ryan et al., 2011). The theoretical framework discussed later will present models that utilized these concepts (Kato et al., 2016)

Obstacles to Academic Success

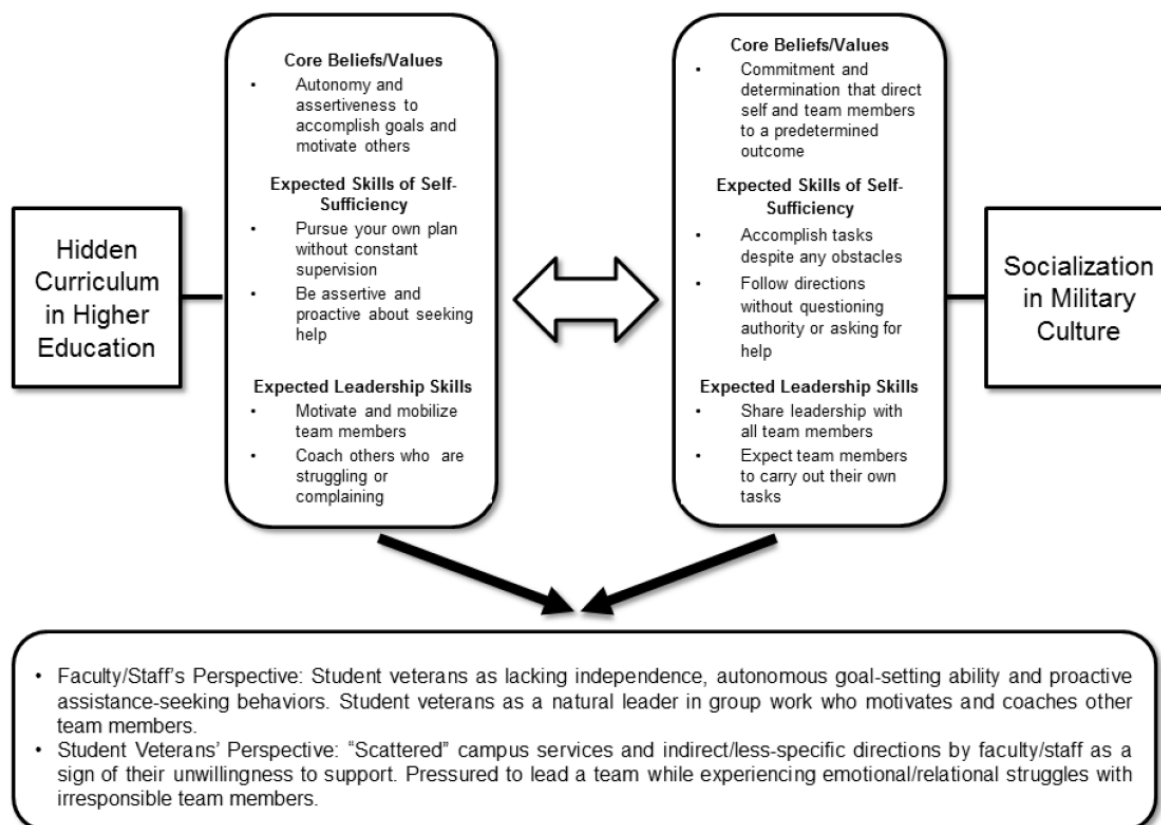
Student Veterans and Finances. Initially, in their academic programs, many student veterans face unfamiliar bureaucracies as they attempt to finance their educational pursuits. Organizational challenges of this nature can be foreign to the student (Kirchner, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011). Enrollment information must be passed from the certifying official of the institution to the Department of Veterans Affairs where any errors in processing will cause a delay in payment. The financial aid process is neither student-friendly nor is it easy for the student veteran to navigate (Elfman, 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Sometimes approved payment distributions don't coincide with the timeline of tuition payments due at the educational institution. Some institutions will postpone due dates to coincide with payments received, but others do not, which automatically places a financial burden on the student veteran. Although the VA has improved the processing times for the earliest recipients of post-9/11, institutions may freeze enrollment due to a lack of payment flexibility (Caspers & Ackerman, 2012). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) noted that a delay in the receipt of benefits to the student veteran may influence the student veteran's attitude toward the institution. There is also the added stress of passing all their courses. If a minimum grade point average and full-time status is not maintained, the student veteran must repay the funds used for the failed credits.

MacLean (2005) found that student veterans often come from families with lower incomes, single-parent status, lack of parental education, and lower high school scores than non-veterans. Demographics bring to light some additional obstacles student-veterans also face

because of their race (Herbold, 1994). As late as 2009, an African American student was more likely to be a veteran than a non-veteran in a four-year public institution (Radford, 2009). These factors serve as obstacles to the academic success of the student veterans that enlist directly after secondary education for the sole purpose of obtaining the educational benefits of enlisting.

Compounding the complexities of financing an education along with a desire to complete their education as soon as possible, student veterans are vulnerable to unscrupulous firms that place self-interests and profit ahead of the veteran (Schade, 2014). For-profit vocational or certificate programs heavily market their institutions to veterans as a viable path to becoming employable sooner. Unfortunately, many of these programs have higher tuition rates and poor track records for credit-transferability and meeting occupational standards for their recent graduates (Beaver, 2012).

Hidden Curriculum. Margolis (2001) defined hidden curriculum as “the elements of socialization that take place in school but are not part of the formal curriculum content” (p. 6). Successful student veterans demonstrate superb leaderships skills, exhibit high maturity, and have unparalleled goal orientation towards higher education (Lim et al., 2020; DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). However, their former world of structure, following orders, and observing the chain of command is in direct conflict to the institutional and social dynamics of a typical higher education institution, as shown in Figure 2.1 (Lim et al., 2020).

Figure 2.1*The Cultural Gap Between Higher Education and the Military and Hidden Curriculum*

Note. From "Invisible cultural barriers: Contrasting perspectives on student veterans' transition" by Lim et al., 2020. *Journal of College Student Development*

Academic Absence. Prolonged absence from academia creates another layer of complexity in the world of the student veteran. The average student veteran is 33 years old, meaning the student veteran could typically incur a fifteen-year absence from their secondary education (Kim & Cole, 2013). This time gap can cause a decay in the skill set necessary for academic success and disconnect the student veteran from a normal college experience as

enjoyed by their traditional peers. The student veteran is likely to have difficulty with academic performance in advanced sequential courses in which a deployment occurs. This is just one factor that leads to a higher education attrition rate of 51% (Cate, 2014).

Tendency to Maintain Social Distance. The student veteran can project an image or a desire for social distance. DiRamio et al. (2008) underscored the point that student veterans seek a position of blending in and being quiet and neutral in class. The lack of desire to express a difference in an opinion can cause turmoil in class in when the student veteran is repeatedly called upon and prefers not to engage (Stone, 2017; Magolda, 1999).

Sub-populations of Student Veteran Student Groups

First Generation Student Veterans. Although many young men and women enlist in all branches of the armed forces, certain population groups are more inclined to seek out the military as a means to gain access to educational opportunities (Radford, 2009). Student veterans are generally from lower to middle-class families, and the majority are first-generation students. The typical first-generation student veteran is often academically challenged with one or more parents not completing a four-year educational program (Reddin, 2019). The issues of first-generation students are well documented (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kuh et al., 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Wurster et al. (2013) found that being a first-generation learner adds significantly to the persistence complexities. Wurster et al. (2013) identified numerous persistence risk factors of a first generation student that are likely to affect the student veteran: (a) having delayed college enrollment, (b) coming from a lower socioeconomic background, (c) having dependents, (d) living off campus, (e) working full time while attending school, (f) being less prepared academically, (g) having lower education aspirations, (h) lacking knowledge in

navigating the application and enrollment process, and (i) lacking financial and institutional literacy that comes from having parents who attended college.

Female Student Veterans.

Health Concerns. The changes in military policies and subsequent expansion of opportunities for female military personnel increased the number of enlisted females from 7,500 during the Vietnam conflict primarily as nurses to 41,000 females enlisted during the Gulf War in wide range of roles including combat (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Stone, 2017). Research in the area of females in combat has revealed important differences in adaptation to stressors between female and male soldiers. When female soldiers and male soldiers are in the same roles in combat, female soldiers appear to be at higher risk for depression (Street et al., 2013). Additionally, there is evidence that PTSD may be twice as high for female soldiers as for their male counterparts (Street et al., 2013). Other research finds that female soldiers may have additional health issues (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009) that might not receive the appropriate medical care from the V.A. Health Care system (Miller, 2015).

Sexual Abuse. Sexual abuse and violence are additional obstacles some female and male student veterans have faced while in uniform (Skinner et al., 2000). According to Kimerling et al. (2010) female student veterans are more likely to face sexual harassment and abuse than their male counterparts. These unwelcomed advances act as stressors to the female student veterans. Female student veterans carry the added burden of sexual harassment and/or sexual assaults as civilians (Skinner et al., 2000) and may have greater difficulty re-establishing the trust that takes place in an academic environment (Magolda, 1992; 1999).

LGBTQ Student Veterans. There is an absence of research on the experience of the LGBTQ student veteran. It has only been in the last decade that this group of student veterans

has received recognition. This category of student veteran may not be binary in gender, which adds greater complexity to their success as a student veteran. As such, the LGBTQ veterans may have additional difficulties in achieving academic success (Iverson & Anderson, 2013; Smith, 2014). Starting in 2011, the VA recognized that LGBTQ veterans present special needs compared to non-LGBTQ veterans (Kauth & Shipherd, 2016). To address their specific concerns and needs, in 2016 the Veterans Health Administration created the Office of Patient Care Services that includes 175 LGBTQ Veteran Case Coordinator Positions (Kauth & Shipherd, 2016). These services, which are specially developed for LGBTQ veterans, has led to significant gains in specialized clinical care (Ramirez et al., 2013). In addressing the issues of this group, it will serve as one less obstacle to student veterans who need this service.

Combat Student Veterans. The student veteran who has combat experience may find transition to higher education even more difficult (Hermes & Rosenheck, 2014). Poor sleeping habits resulting from combat experience and insomnia may affect academic performance. McGuffin et al. (2019) concluded that insomnia has a detrimental effect on academic performance across both groups of students, veteran and traditional, but the impact is greater for student veterans. Inman et al. (1990) found that the combat veteran has a higher negative effect from insomnia that may be from nightmares associated with traumatic re-experiencing, making the effects of insomnia harder to overcome. In addition to insomnia, there are other mental health issues that the combat student veteran may face. It is common for a student veteran to address issues of depression, anxiety, manic episodes, and PTSD.

Parenthood and Student Veterans. Not all student veterans are single. According to Glasser et al. (2009), student veterans who have families of their own face added potential stressors in meeting the demands of family, work, and college while adapting to the academic

culture that clashes with that of the military culture. The dimensions of parenthood, either as a single parent or a married couple, can make completion of a degree program impossible (Jenner, 2017). It remains critical that institutions provide resources to support this group of student veterans.

Theoretical Frameworks

Interest in the success of the student veteran has grown. Different models have been created to describe the transition process of a soldier to a student veteran (Falcone, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981). The models look at each aspect of the student veteran, including the effects of war (Elliot et al., 2011). Each of the models has a unique perspective as to what the researcher feels is significant. Early models focused squarely on the transition of the service-member to becoming a student, and more recent models have cast a broader net to become more comprehensive. Each new model adds additional concepts that fit the student success. The purpose of presenting several frameworks is to show how veteran theory has evolved and specialized.

The added concepts are a natural progression of knowledge gained in retention of the student veteran in higher education. The growth of the student affairs field in the preceding four decades provides a greater foundation in working with students. As the body of knowledge has grown in student affairs, so has the field of knowledge of the student veteran. The new knowledge has led to new theoretical frameworks. The following section outlines several key theoretical models that intended to enhance the potential for persistence of the student veteran.

Models of Transition

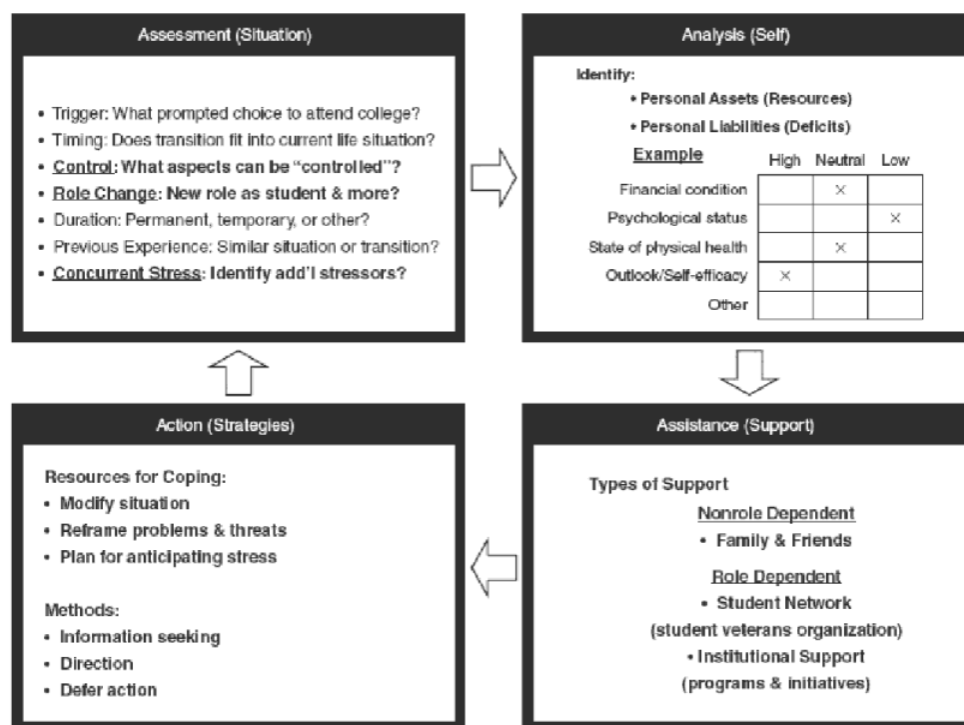
Early research in this area focused on the transition of the returning veteran to student, which served the purpose well for the era. However, within the last decade, more excellent

knowledge yields newer programs that did not exist that aid the student veteran. We begin with a discussion of the models in chronological order.

Schlossberg's Models of Transition. One of the earliest models was created by Schlossberg (1981). This model weighed exclusively on the individual with no regard to the external environment or support. Of the models in the discussion, the Schlossberg 4S model is the focuses on specific situations, which may account for the adaptation necessary of the student veteran. Additional research by Ryan et al. (2011) also utilized and supports this model of transition. In another model, Schlossberg (1984) depicted a more expanded approach. In this model the transition occurs in each of the four steps: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategies, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2

Counseling Adults in Transition



Note. From *Counseling adults in career transition* by Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). Springer.

Schlossberg's (1984) model expanded some of the basic tenants as described in Figure 2.2. In examining the transition from soldier to citizen and student veteran process, Figure 2.3 highlights three categories of Characterizing: the transition, the individual, and the environment. This begins the understanding of the complexity in the academic journey of the student veteran.

Figure 2.3

Counseling Adults in Transition

The Transition	Coping Resources			The Transition Process
Event or nonevent resulting in change	Balance of assets and liabilities			Reactions over time for better or for worse
Type <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated • Unanticipated • Nonevent • Chronic hassle Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship of person to transition • Setting in which transition occurs Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Routines • Assumptions • Roles 	Variables Characterizing the Transition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event or nonevent characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trigger ○ Timing ○ Source ○ Role change ○ Duration ○ Previous experience with a similar transition ○ Concurrent stress • Assessment 	Variables Characterizing the Individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and demographic characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Socioeconomic status ○ Sex role ○ Age and stage of life ○ State of health • Psychological resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ego development ○ Personality ○ Outlook ○ Commitments and values • Coping responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Functions: Controlling situation, meaning, or stress ○ Strategies: Information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, intrapsychic behavior 	Variables Characterizing the Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Types: Intimate, family unit, friendship network, institution ○ Functions: Affect, affirmation, aid, feedback ○ Measurement: Convoy • Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Actual ○ Perceived ○ Utilized ○ Created 	Phases of Assimilation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pervasiveness • Disruption • Integration, for better or for worse Appraisal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of transition, resources, results • Of preoccupation vs. life satisfaction

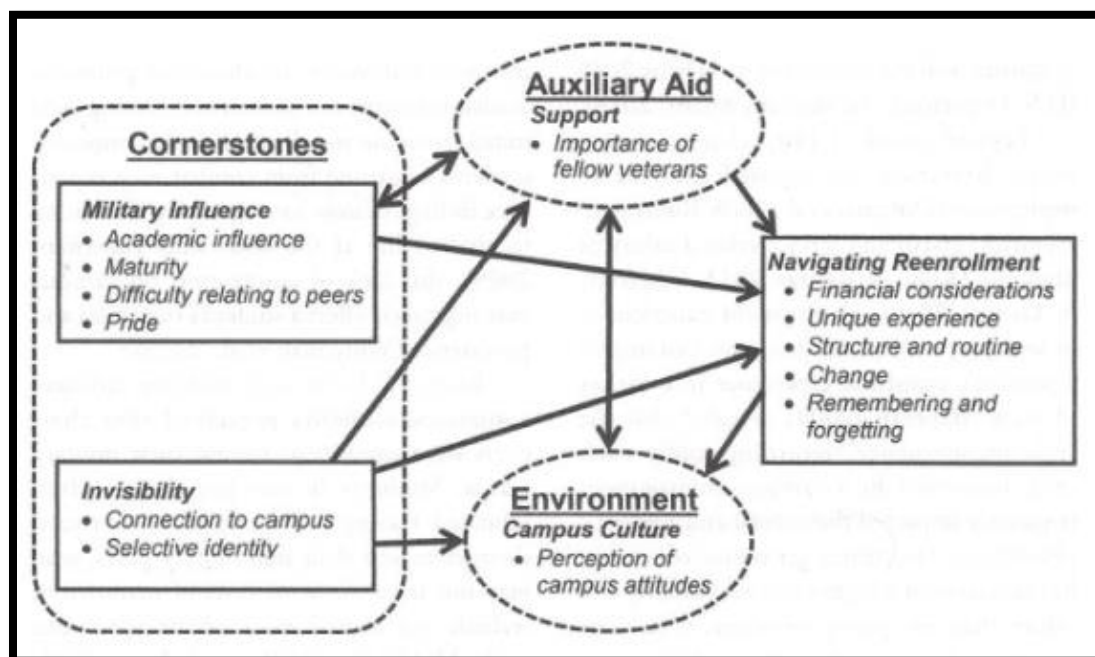
Note. From *Counseling adults in career transition* by Schlossberg, N. K. (1984), Springer.

Livingston Models of Transition. The student veteran garners the attention of other notable researchers, including Livingston et al. (2011), who developed a model that pulls together the factors that influence and impact the student veteran. The Student Veteran Academic

and Social Transition Model (SVASTM) describes a grounded theory that explains a student's re-enrollment management as shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4

Student Veteran and Social Transition Model



Note. From “Coming Home: Student Veterans’ Articulation of college Re-enrollment” by Livingston et al. (2011). *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*.

In the current study, in order to examine the applicability of the SVASTM and the potential applicability of other models, participant narratives were deconstructed from the participant narratives to identify three themes. Participant experiences were then placed within the themes.

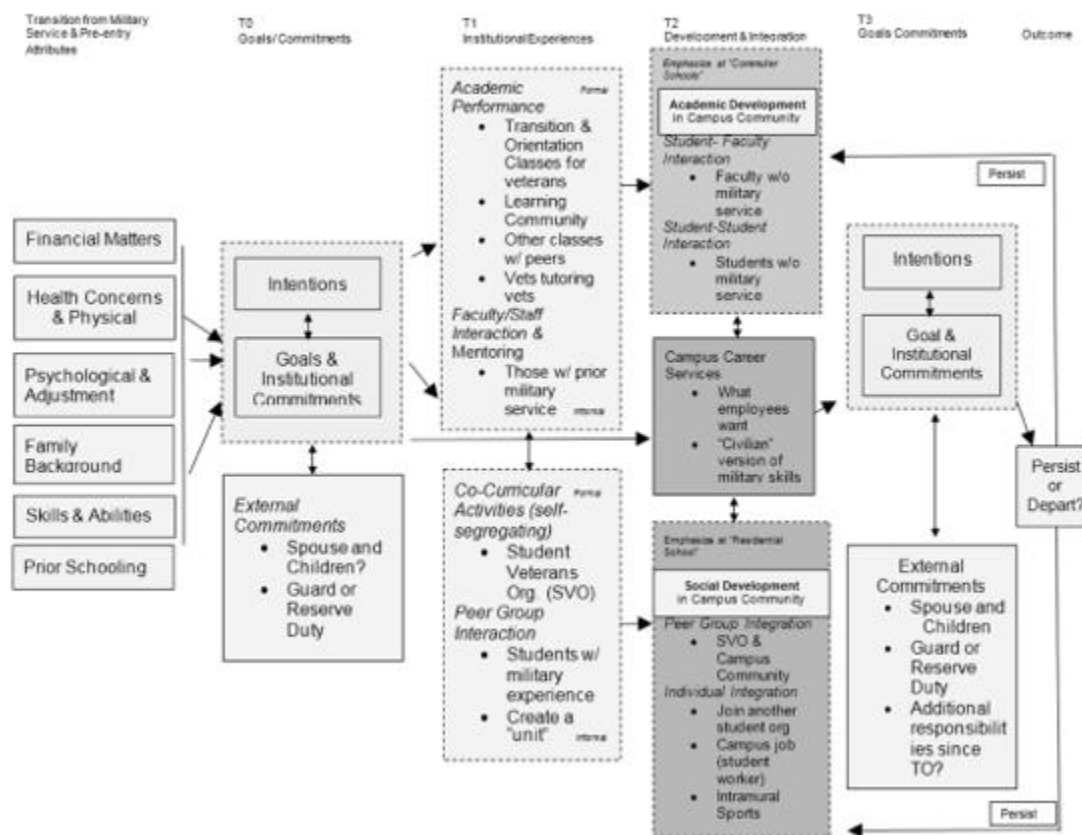
Counseling Adults in Transition

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) established a framework that articulates the needs of persistence. The identification of this framework, Adoption of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure for Student Veterans, provides an examination of the progression of

student veteran, as shown in Figure 2.5. This framework reveals for the first time a more comprehensive collection of the factors that will lead a student veteran to persist or drop out.

Figure 2.5

Adoption of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure for Student Veterans



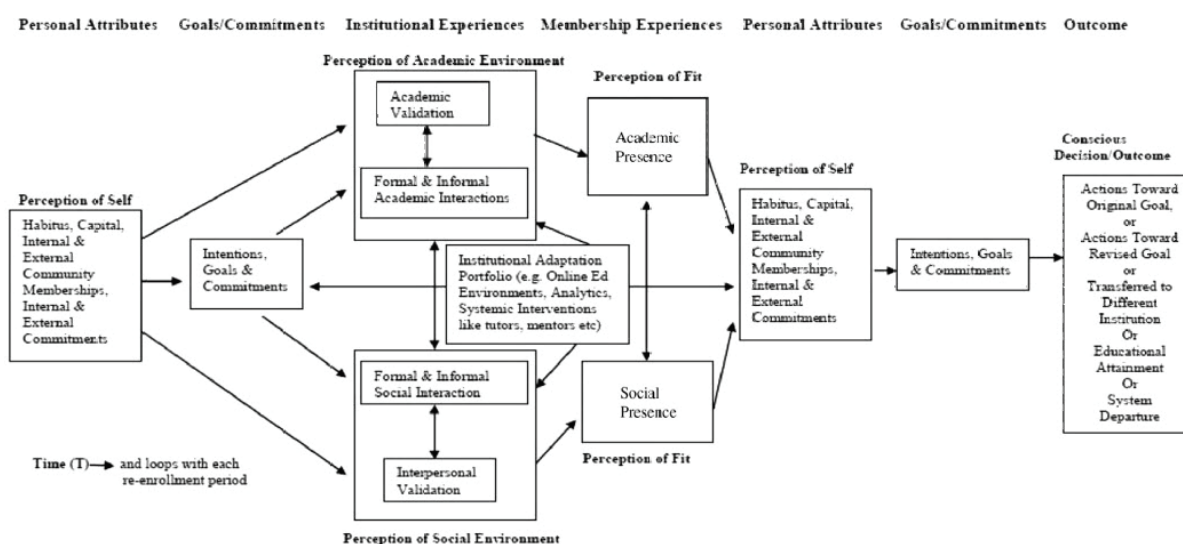
Note. From *Transition 2.0: A theoretical critique of Tinto's Model for exploring student-veteran persistence*, by DiRamio (2011). Loyola University

With the description of the models, the Adoption of Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure for Student Veterans captures a majority of issues that challenge the student veteran and graphically represents steps of transition (DiRamio, 2011). This model expects to provide unique information that describes wartime deployment and the transition required to be a successful veteran.

Changes in technology have allowed the student veteran greater access to a formal classroom. The work of Falcone (2011) and later improved upon by Shea and Bidjerano (2014) to include feedback to the learner, addresses a more comprehensive model to influence as shown in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6

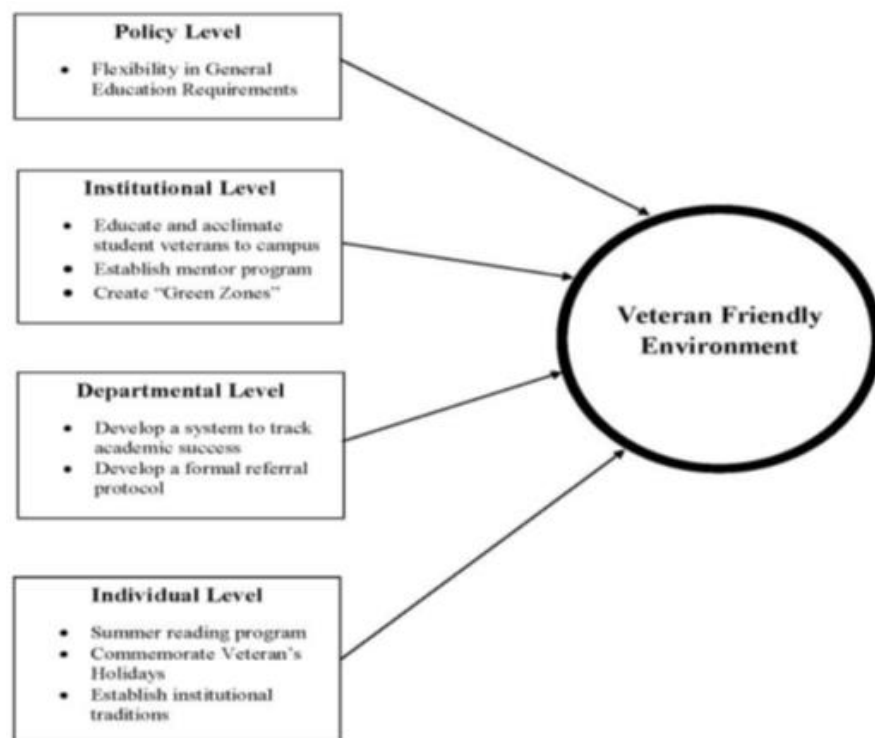
Persistence First Generation and Working-Class Learner



Note. From Falcone's Student Persistence Model (Falcone, 2011).

Falcone's Student Persistence Model considers previous factors and adds online education to those previously discussed. The introduction of an on-line component of learning identifies a key area of concern for the student veteran as well.

Another model to depict the needs for the student veteran is Green and VanDusen's (2012) Veteran Friendly Environment Model. This model somewhat simplistically describes numerous areas that influence the student veteran. This model, as shown in Figure 2.7, highlights the areas of support that are suggested by the author for student veteran persistence.

Figure 2.7*Veteran Friendly Environment Model*

Note. From *A quantitative study of student veterans' intent to persist* by Van Dusen (2011). Texas Tech University.

The evolution of student veteran transition models over the last thirty years has expanded the knowledge base with specific results. Each model has advantages in gaining unique perspectives, but each model alone may not identify a critical area that is crucial to the student veteran's academic success. The theoretical framework for this study is DiRamio's (2011), *Transition 2.0: A Theoretical Critique of Tinto's Model for Exploring Student-Veteran Persistence* (as shown in Figure 2.5). This framework provided a broad chronological window since it captures the experiences during the formative years to graduation including areas of the attending institution.

Summary

This literature review has reviewed previous research that provides context that is essential to understanding the academic success of the student veteran. The history of the GI Bill explained the formation of the policy. Specific literature addressed the background of the transitions that occur from a civilian to a soldier to that of a student veteran (Ackerman et al., 2009). The specific challenges faced by the student veterans were explored as well as obstacles for unique population groups that underscore the importance of awareness of diverse situations. The conclusion identified several theoretical models that identify programs and policies that support student veterans in reaching their educational goals.

Also discussed in this literature review was an examination of the theoretical frameworks applicable to the student veteran. There are number of models, and each model is unique and a reflection of the researcher. It is through these models that a progression of profession has evolved in helping the student veteran persist.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology that was used in the current study. This chapter discusses the decisions based on the research to answer the underlying research questions “What effect does deployment have on the returning student veteran” and “What has the institution done for the student veteran to help them reach their educational goals” by examining a finite group of students. Chapter 3 includes research design, participants, an instrument for data collection, data analysis, data and study quality, human subject approval, procedures and timelines, and a summary.

For the purposes of this research project, a participant could be any service member that attended at least one semester of college and who returns to this same higher education institution. The service member could be from any branch of the military or a current service member of the National Guard or Reserves. The participant is a current student or an alumnus of this institution.

Research Design

This research study used a qualitative research method to gain the knowledge needed to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The Narrative Inquiry method of Qualitative Analysis was used to capture the data. Narrative inquiry examines human lives through the lens of a narrative, honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). This method provides a way for the research subject to communicate experiences. These experiences often are in the form of individual narratives. Narrative inquiry includes personal reflection, their causes, and their effects from one or several individuals (Plummer, 1983). However, narrative inquiry is more than just storytelling or capturing stories (Bell, 2002). With the reconstruction of the individual's

biography, the researcher identifies supplemental information to the research question. The reconstruction then supports the abstract that highlights the processes of the different theories that relate to the life of the participant and unique features. It was the intention of the current study to capture data from all the participants to create a collection of experiences that answer the research question. Field notes were used to record observations and behaviors of participants that were then used to interpret data collected from the interviews.

The collection of data from the interview provided the participants' perspectives from their lived experiences. It is from these rich and thick descriptions where student veterans' lived experiences could shed light on what changes occur to the returning student (Clandinin, 2013; Denzin, 1989).

Participants

The following section describes the process of participant identification, qualifications, and selection. Again, a participant could be any service member that attended at least one semester of college, who was either discharged or is currently in the National Guard or Reserves, or who was deployed overseas in a combat or support role within the last ten years and has returned to higher education from any branch of the military or veteran or current service member. A letter describing this study was sent to the Director of the Midwest regional state university seeking the support for this research project, which could not be undertaken without their approval. The identification of research participants began with an email (Appendix A) that was sent out to all veterans attending the Midwest regional state university. Other sources of potential research participants included the local chapter of Student Veterans of America, referrals from other student veterans, and recommendations from faculty and advisors. Special consideration was given to attract all genders and minority student veterans if more research

applicants responded than were needed. If a sufficient number of research applicants had not been reached, snowball sampling would have been implemented to recruit the number of research subjects.

The objective was to seek maximum inclusiveness, and no student veterans were disqualified from this research study based on their age, marital status, sexual orientation, or religion. Extra efforts were made to seek members of these groups to ensure all voices would be heard. However, due to diversity limitations of the student veteran population at the Midwest regional state university, it was not possible to collect student veteran participants from all population groups.

To prevent any question of compensating the student veterans for their participation, the recruitment letter indicated a direct contribution of \$50 per participant to the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) at the regional state university. The direct contribution to the VRC serves a three-fold purpose. First, a direct contribution removes direct compensation to the student veteran (e.g., free lunch, gift card, etc.). Second, for the prospects who do participate, contributions help pay-it-forward for future student veterans. Finally, the contributions assist the VRC and the student veteran.

The Dissertation Committee approved this research project, with edits required, on July 14, 2021. After the completion of corrections, the research project was submitted to the Midwest regional state university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and approval was granted on August 13, 2021. With permission in hand, the VRC sent out a recruitment letter on behalf of the researcher on September 26, 2021. After receiving responses from two participants (less than the desired number of student-veterans) another recruitment letter was sent out on October 15, 2021. The second recruitment letter generated two more participants. After a meeting with the VRC

Director, a third recruitment letter was sent directly from the researcher to student veterans. This third attempt yielded two more participants. There are several factors in the lower than expected interest in participation. The pandemic may have made students more cautious. Fewer students were willing to freely express themselves, and it is reflective of a larger trend where people are more cautious in general about disclosing or releasing information about themselves.

After six weeks of recruiting participants for the study, the target number of participants had yet to be reached. In adjusting the criteria, the potential pool of potential participants increased in size. Additionally, the requirement of *current student* was changed to *student or graduate*. In doing so, the yield of personal snowball added three more student veterans. Changing the requirement of the study to allow present student veterans and former graduate student veterans increased the pool of participants. Now former student veterans who had become successful in their careers could share their stories of deployment, military, and educational experiences. This yielded unexpected data to the research project: successful student veterans, which added another dimension of data that enhanced the value of academic study to success in their careers.

The recruitment of research participants was discontinued upon reaching survey at nine participants, which is one less than the survey participant maximum number (ten) of student veterans. Under ideal conditions, it remains a reasonable expectation to achieve the participant maximum of ten student veterans. According to the United States Department of Veteran Affairs (2020), in May 2019, this Midwest regional state university had 204 current students receiving the Post 9/11 GI Bill. However, interviews were stopped upon saturation of data.

The potential participants were given a screening interview and asked a series of questions to determine their eligibility; they were also made aware of the Adult Informed

Consent, which required a signature at the time of the formal research interview. Each participant was then asked a series of questions about how they feel their combat experiences affected their return to higher education. After the adjustment of screening criteria, saturation was achieved.

Participants were military veterans who have been deployed during either Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (from 2001 to present) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (from 2003 to present) and are now attending the Midwest regional state university. This timeframe was chosen to foster data collection as participants would have been deployment within the last ten years.

A profile of the student veteran participants began to emerge. Table 1 identifies basic information of the participants. Certain demographic information such as race, major, and hometown was intentionally omitted from this table to protect the anonymity of the participants, since identification of these individuals would be highly likely.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	M/F	Age	1 st Gen	Branch	Degree	Attained/Pursued
Allen	M	25-30	No	Marines	Bachelor	Pursued
Bradley	M	25-30	Yes	Army	Bachelor	Pursued
Charles	M	40-45	Yes	Nat Guard	Masters	Attained
Jack	M	40-45	Yes	Army	Masters	Pursued
Mark	M	40-45	Yes	Army	Bachelors	Pursued
Steven	M	40-45	Yes	Nat Guard	Bachelors	Pursued
Janet	F	30-35	Yes	Nat Guard	Masters	Pursued
John	M	35-40	Yes	Nat Guard	Bachelors	Attained
Larry	M	30-35	Yes	Nat Guard	Masters	Attained

Data Collection Method

The narrative inquiry process (Creswell & Poth, 2007) is to interpret the meaning of the larger story or objective experiences and place it in a chronology. The researcher identifies factors that have shaped the participant's life by reconstructing the individual's biography. The following describes the data collection process.

The method used to collect the data was that of a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview process provides a foundation for the questions and potential responses to align to conceptual framework of a study. The interview consisted of fifteen open-ended questions, which allowed participants the opportunity to provide answers that they felt were accurate. The questions covered the five major categories of the theoretical framework: (a) Transition from Military Service and Pre-entry Attributes, (b) Goals/Commitments, (c) Institutional Experiences, (d) Development and Integration, and (e) Reformulate Goals/Commitments. The questions were aligned to the model to ensure that participants' responses closely supported the model.

In terms of interviews, to address the present concern of social distancing, the participants were offered the option of a face-to-face meeting or Zoom tele-conferencing. All participants chose the Zoom option, citing safety and convenience. The Zoom tele-conferencing was conducted on the participants' portable (smart device) and personal (home) workstations. Upon receiving initial indication of interest, an email was sent to the participants. The participants were asked to read and sign the Adult Informed Consent form (Appendix B), The Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video/Audio Recording (Appendix C), and a copy of the Interview Questions (Appendix D).

The interview consisted of three parts. First, the researcher introduced himself to the participants and identified similar experiences, which allowed rapport to develop quickly. Second, the researcher asked the interview questions. The questions were categorized as follows: (a) participant's pre-entry attributes, (b) institutional experiences, and (c) development and integration. Third, the researcher provided an opportunity for the participant to provide any additional comments. In closing, all participants were given an opportunity to review their comments, but all expressed interest in seeing the final dissertation only. All participants were comfortable in answering the questions as well as being recorded for later analysis and review, as confirmed with their signature of the Adult Informed Consent form (Appendix B) and The Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video/Audio Recording (Appendix C). Interviews were one and a half hours to two hours in length.

The Zoom interviews were recorded. The interview was recorded in both audio and video formats. Auto-transcripts were generated from the audio portion of the recordings. The transcripts were then uploaded into the NVivo software for processing and analysis. During each interview, field notes were collected as well as memos, which allowed the researcher to capture gestures and other non-verbal cues that could bring different meaning than the transcribed word.

After each interview, transcripts and field notes were analyzed for emergent themes. Several similar patterns began to emerge early in the interviewing process. By the end of the ninth interview, it appeared there was no new information being revealed. At that point, the researcher determined that saturation had been met by the ninth participant and no further recruitment was needed.

Instrument for Data Collection

Interviews and observations are part of the data collection picture, which supports this semi-structured interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2007). The researcher gained insight by observing reactions to the research questions in the interview process. The semi-structured interview was used to provide consistency in the questions, which yielded answers that provide specific data from all respondents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The student veterans were asked a series of fifteen questions. These questions were intended to reveal their academic background, what experience in combat influenced their academics, descriptions of their relationships with fellow students and instructors, and how they perceive their sense of belonging at the institution. Additional questions were asked as follow-up questions that are not listed to clarify information that will fit into the transition model described earlier.

The interviews were conducted face to face, after signing the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A), in accordance with social distancing guidelines at a mutually agreed upon time and neutral place and by means of audio-visual communication (e.g., Zoom). The interviews were expected to be two hours in duration based on semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) and were electronically recorded. In addition to the electronically recorded segment of the interview, field notes were collected to capture the non-verbal forms of communication (facial expressions, reactions, body movements, etc.). Each research participant was encouraged to review the transcripts and field notes for accuracy immediately after the interview. In summary, the narrative answers to these questions were intended to aid in developing a broad picture from the research participants to answer the research question.

Data Analysis

Efforts were taken to establish the trustworthiness of this study. The first step was to capture the narrative story in an honest manner. The narrative analysis, as noted in Creswell and Poth (2007), is a three-dimensional approach, then adding to that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak of interaction continuity and situation. The need to maintain sufficient credibility in the qualitative study addresses the concern of the reader (Firestone, 1987).

To discuss the concepts of themselves, two additional forms of rigor were utilized: methodological and interpretive (Lincoln et al., 2011). As previously discussed, some questions added to the credibility of a qualitative research study (Stake, 2005). The open codes were grouped following the axial coding process (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). After the completion of all the interviews, reconstruction began, and further actions were taken to establish trustworthiness.

The analysis of the participants' transcribed stories was performed utilizing NVIVO-12 software, a software application for qualitative research that allows researchers to organize data into categories and sub-categories. For transparency and accuracy, each participant was again given the opportunity to review the results.

First cycle coding consisted of assigning labels from a word or phrase of the participant. The second cycle of analysis incorporated memos and added entries made of observations from the field notes, additional meanings, and observed reactions of participants. The software within the NVIVO-12 software matrix coding queries provided word counts to identify patterns and themes.

Data and Study Quality

The methodological rigor and the building of trust begins early in the process with a participant. Jones et al. (2013) described several strategies in working with participants, starting with the researchers' conveyance in the project itself and expectations of the participants and the incentives it offered, the reciprocity of what the participants could get from the involvement, active listening and participation skills, the ability of the researcher to ask questions that stimulate further reflection, and the participant's checking of the data. The interpretive rigor element of trustworthiness is described by several strategies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each of these strategies provides an element to the research results.

The strategy of triangulation was used to compare findings. Three or more persons, in this case a review by the participants, primary researcher and a professional in the veteran services community, independently analyzed the sample data and compared the findings. This cross-checking provided a solid foundation of the interviews (Patton, 2014). This method of peer review by a fellow veteran also provided an insider's perspective.

The strategy of member checks (response validation) is where the primary analysis is sought from the participants on the initial findings. The participants were provided at least three opportunities to review their comments prior to publication (Maxwell, 2013). Member checks have been proven to be the single most important way of ruling out misinterpretation.

The third strategy in data collection is that of adequate engagement. The researcher is attempting to reach a total understanding of the phenomenon or saturation. Saturation occurs when data from the emerging findings are repeated and no new information is presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2014).

The fourth strategy is that of peer review (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This peer review was conducted by a terminal degree holder in the field of psychology who is now a consultant at the U.S. Veterans Affairs facility. This reviewer, who was not involved in this project, reviewed the participant responses to the researcher's interpretation of initial results.

The fifth strategy, audit trail, is how the researcher arrives at the findings when the replication of findings is not likely (Dey, 2007). The strategy of rich and thick descriptions where findings and evidence are presented enable transferability (Lincoln et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014).

The sixth and last strategy is the concept of maximum variation. Patton (2014) indicated purposively seeking out participants with the greatest amount of diversification to cut through the noise of variation with respect to the consumers of the research. Extra effort was undertaken to ensure the greatest diversity possible of student veterans.

Human Subjects Approval

After obtaining approval for the study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), an email was sent through the Midwest regional state university's VRC to the current student veteran roster. The study consisted of nine student-veteran volunteers from the Midwest regional state university's Veterans Resource Center who indicated an interest in participating in this research. Each participant was asked a series of questions about how they feel about their experiences as student veterans. Their comments were electronically recorded and transcribed. The findings from each interview were coded and analyzed. For transparency and accuracy, the participants had the opportunity to review the results. The researcher reviewed the risks with the participants who also signed an Informed Consent Form. To capture the detailed rich and thick descriptions essential for narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2007), questions were asked to the student

veteran to elicit the information for this study. To reach the basic premise of qualitative research that relies on "life experienced by those who live them" (Chase, 2011, p. 421), open-ended questions were provided to the participants with a channel to convey their experiences.

Research subjects were provided an authorization release at the beginning of the process as to the purpose of this qualitative research project, their role, and the long-term uses of these results. Additionally, assurance was provided as to anonymity, confidentiality, and that there was no conflict of interest (the researcher cannot influence military actions, promotions, or discipline) nor does the researcher have any superior subordinate relationships with the research subjects.

The confidentiality of the interviews supports credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). These factors help support the narrative inquiry method. A copy of the transcripts and research study will be made available to the participants upon request.

Procedures and Timeline

The research project occurred over a six-month time span. The proposal for this research was approved spring semester 2021. After obtaining approval of the Higher Education Department, approval was secured from the Midwest regional state university's Institutional Review Board. With approval secured, the recruitment of participants was completed within ninety days. Interviews were conducted concurrently with recruiting and completed by November 2021. Coding and theme development was completed by December 2021, a review of the findings by the participants and others was finished by January 2022, and the completion of the analysis and transcripts was completed by February 2022.

Summary

This chapter described the tasks associated with the methods used for this research study. A description of the research design provided a background for why the narrative inquiry research method was appropriate for this research project. This chapter also described the basis for selecting the narrative inquiry as well as its uses and limits.

The participant section included requirements for eligibility to participate and how potential participants were selected. The instrument for data collection presented the survey tool, interview, and data collection. The analysis section discussed how data was transformed into meaningful statements. The data study and quality section described the steps taken for trustworthiness.

The section of human subject approval addressed the considerations taken to establish confidentiality and rapport with the participant to ensure study credibility and to communicate to the participant of both values of this research project to fellow veterans. Finally, the procedures and timelines provide a realistic timeframe of the events of this research project.

In further improvement of this study several items of design could have been done differently. Extending the length of the research project, which may yield a greater number of participants. Socializing with the student veterans at the VRC may have opened inroads, but the pandemic encouraged many not participate in social functions. Interviews of a longer duration may lead to a greater insight of the participant. Finally interview questions focusing on the participant and their motivation and desire to succeed. These items may provide greater insight for the student veteran.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this narrative inquiry qualitative study of the nine student veterans' and their return to higher education. The intent is to improve a shared awareness between student-veterans, faculty, staff, friends, and fellow students. It is evident with a plethora of research relating to the student-veteran that the understanding of the influences of deployment have not been widely explored at the institution where the current study was conducted.

The overall question that guided this research project was: *What is the influence of deployment on the returning student veteran to a four-year institution?*

The research questions, used to support the overall question, and aligned to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 included:

RQ1. What influence does deployment have on the student veteran returning to higher education?

RQ2. What has the institution done for the student veteran to help them reach their educational goals?

This chapter starts with a description of the selection and recruitment process and basic demographic information. The findings are then organized by research questions and theoretical framework.

Consistent to the theoretical framework, five themes quickly emerged from the data: (a) Transition from Military Service & Pre-entry Attributes, (b) Goals/Commitments, (c) Institutional Experiences, (d) Development and Integration, and (e) Reformulate Goals/Commitments. These were later grouped into three broader themes of (a) Goals/Commitments, (b) Institutional Commitment, and (c) Development and Integration. Most participants went

Figure 4.1

[illegible]

The five major themes were then supported by interview observations and field notes that were collected during the interviews. Due to the variety of academic readiness, answers to some questions varied greatly between participants. Some participants articulated their experiences clearly, and some participants projected more distress in describing the challenges in obtaining an education than others.

Results

The theoretical framework for this research is based on the Adaption of Tinto's Longitudinal Departure for Student Veterans (DiRamio, 2011), which is examined in this research project. The narrative results from the participant interviews supports the theoretical framework, as described next. The narratives were analyzed utilizing NVivo software, and the emergent themes were consistent to support those found in the theoretical framework (DiRamio, 2011).

Theme 1: Goals/Commitments

The Goals and Commitments theme is comprised of two subthemes: Transition From Military Service and Pre-Entry Attributes and Individual Intention and Institutional Commitments. Naturally, this theme is present in all the participants of this study. However, my findings reveal that not all participants have the same preparedness, background, or goals, and some faced additional physical and/or mental challenges.

Transition from Military Service and Pre-Entry Attributes. From the theoretical framework description in the literature review, The Transition from Military Service and Pre-Entry Attribute Theme contains five areas: Issues on Financial Matters, Health Concerns and Physical Disabilities, Psychological Adjustment difficulties, Family Background, Skills and

Abilities, and Prior Schooling The following are the narratives that support this theme. All the participants have this theme in common in one area or another.

One of the first items discussed as a pre-entry attribute was the financing of higher education. John provided an example of how it is common for young adults to seek military service as a means to access higher education. John said:

A buddy that was one year older than me was in the military. He told me about how the military was going to pay for his college, and I knew that, paying for college, that was not going to happen with my parents. They were never going to be able to pay for my college. And I knew that I didn't have \$30-\$40,000 just sitting around so it was kind of a very easy decision. Because for one, I wanted to be patriotic, but wanted to get my college paid for.

Another area of Transition from Military Service and Pre-entry Attributes is that of Health Concerns. Health concerns do not affect all returning student-veterans, but the issue can be problematic for those for whom it does affect. Mark is one of the students who was impacted greatly from multiple deployments:

Health is one of my one of my biggest challenges, right now, because of my PTSD, anxiety disorders, and dis-connectivity. A plethora of different mental health issues because of the deployments and stuff like that. These are all challenges on a daily basis, for me, because not only do I have to take meds just to keep me calm just to keep - you know just to keep me stable. You know because I have that fight or flight type of deal, you know and if the instructor would make me angry, I would just walk out of the room, I would have. You know, without the meds, I think I probably would just walk out of room say screw you I'm done with this you know because there's plenty of days, trust me.

Besides the invisible scars, there are the physical scars of a soldier. Mark went on to say:

With my service-connected disability I can't lift. You realize can't do this, you can't do that, you know standing, and sitting for long periods of time. I really was I was at a loss, and if it wasn't for the VA (Veterans Administration) I don't know what I would be doing. With VOC rehab they helped me get back to my path that goal that I've always wanted and I'm grateful for that. That I'm able to pursue that pathway again. In engineering.

Some participants noted Psychological Adjustment difficulties, such as when one goes from having full control of their time, to no control, and back to full control. Allen, a former Marine, exhibited struggles both as a former student and a former deployed soldier. He said:

I would just say, being in the Marines and having a work schedule, that's always kind of crazy, and you have unexpected Field Operations you have to do you are kind of getting treated like crap a lot of the time, so just kind of being back in an environment like school, where you're basically free. It's kind of the opposite, when in the Marine Corps, your whole life is kind of under control, especially when you're in boot camp, but still, you know, to a pretty good extent throughout your whole time, throughout your enlistment.

Other Psychological Difficulties emerge when returning to the civilian environment from deployment. Janet brought up an issue that is completely unfamiliar to those without military exposure. She said:

And big things about returning from deployment, there is that mental health aspect to my becoming pregnant certain right after deployment. I think it's hard to say like what was influenced by the military deployment, and influence of hormones from having kids, but there was a struggle with. You know, depression and there, but I can't place it to my

deployment. I do feel like there, there could definitely be some connections and, as far as influencing my school. I would say that there could be some influences there. Having the support of the VA has been very beneficial for me as well. As far as losing time I felt like that I have not received any benefit from it. It was a shitty deployment not that there was any danger because there wasn't any danger but being a female veteran. The experiences are that your life different than males and my personal experiences is just very lonely and isolating so coming back from being like in a sense of isolation for a year. I'm probably I was very happy to be back so that's why I was like that. Depression was from the military having kids you know, having a lot of transition at once.

An additional Pre-Entry Attribute is how family background often influences their decision to enter the military. Charles stated:

My grandfather was in the service; he was an important part of our lives growing up. Just because we didn't have family here, except for my mother's side, so we visited with him quite a bit growing up. He didn't really talk about his services much because he was in the Pacific, and so we didn't really talk a whole lot about it. But, I did a history project on him. When I was young, in grade school, I still have it - the history project, going to war in Okinawa and fighting the Japanese over there. And it was pretty difficult story for him to tell, so it stuck out in my mind. And so- with his service, my brother and I both really felt compelled to continue that on in our family.

In regard to relating to skills and abilities, those with military experience have improved sense of leadership skills. All nine participants had narratives relating to this area. One participant spoke of his experience where decision making ability improved. Larry stated:

In our premobilization training and we're running through some exercises, and we had some attrition in leadership, and I was the ad hoc squad leader, and you know I had spoken to earlier about my lack of self-confidence and stuff and had difficulty making decisions, you know in impromptu and would freeze and there was one particular mission, where it kind of clicked for me. Do the courses and after-action reviews and other things on some other missions that I just grabbed the mission like you know grab the horns, to steer the things, to make decisions.

Andrew continued from his earlier comments to describe further the dichotomy the student veteran experiences when transitioning from a highly structured environment to that of complete freedom. He said:

A lot of things are beyond your control, and what you're doing next, and where you're going and who you're interacting with, none of those things are really in your control, so then being in college is total opposite of that, because it's, you have total control over who you can be around and what you're doing. And, you know, your major and the courses you're taking, and all those kinds of things are how you're using your time and all those things are totally within your control and so good.

Extending from that further, Charles was more descriptive of the concept of transitioning from a highly structured environment to one of complete autonomy. He said:

When I came back, it took me a while to transition for sure. I mean, I guess just being in another country like Iraq, and seeing what has gone on over that time frame for since 2002-2003, that we have been there for such a long time. And knowing how many deaths occurred there and you know, seeing what was going on. It just was a difficult time to come back to that because you know exactly what you're going to be doing every single

day. With your mission, you know exactly what you're supposed to do. You're fed everything you've dressed everything you're paid. I mean, you know everything what's going to happen with your day, except for when things goes wrong. So the problem for me was when I came back and for many veterans is that they have a hard time transitioning back into civilian life where I got to wake up on my own, I got nobody in a bunk next to me to, you know, convince me, to suck it up. Nobody's going to make your food, and tell you what to wear. I got my own time on my hands. So, the routine is was a little different. And it took a while. But the biggest thing that I mean that I would say that encouraged me to keep on in school, because of my deployment was the GI Bill and I had it benefit to us, so I know I had to do I needed to use those benefits when I got back to complete my school.

Each part serves as an element to understanding the larger commitment of persistence with some factors having a greater impact than others to individuals. In Bradley's case, experiences in war drove his intention. He recounted:

I realized, yeah, it was you just end up really seeing what I mean, I'd been in third world countries already before that, but I just hadn't seen what war does to country. And you people take it for granted here is like I did when I was going to my undergrad. And I came back, and it was, you know, study, study, study and make sure you get that degree and utilize your GI bill to the max as much as you can and keep moving forward.

The participants spoke to issues relate to Transition From Military and Pre-Entry Attributes that support the existing research described earlier that relates to transitioning (Ackerman et al., 2009; Bauman, 2009; Livingston, 2009). Excerpts from three of the collection of narratives from the areas underscore the importance of identifying and supporting each area.

Individual Intention and Institutional Commitments. The theme of Goals and Commitments is broken down by Individual Intention and Institutional Commitments. The Individual Intention is from the perspective of the student veteran. The Institutional Commitments is focused on the institution.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) referred to the work of Tinto where individual commitments take on two major forms, Goal and Institutional, when he defined the goal commitment as dedication of the student and Institutional Commitment as loyalty to college or university. An example of individual commitment are those incoming students with a pre-defined major of study. For goal-oriented students, this tends to aid in their persistence. An Institutional Commitment is where the school is primarily attended for selective reasons by the student. Both commitments, although different, have an impact on their desire to attend and complete a program of study.

Andrew, a second-generation student whose parents both had expectations of his pursuing higher education attendance, illustrated individual intention when he said:

I should say, that was made pretty early on to attend. I don't know, if there was a specific point where I decided that I was going to do it, it was always just kind of in the back of my mind that I expected that I would, because both my, my parents had experience in higher education. My dad has two master's degrees. So just kind of going off that and then my brother was in college. And so just kind of it was just a culture thing, where it's like, everyone around me on their friends and everyone went to college

Bradley said the following about the institutional intention:

I say the Student Veterans Organization, here was definitely a big help with transitioning back into college. Because when I started before, I wasn't really Do I really have anyone

to talk to? It was just weird. didn't like ... you know, I wasn't..., I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't like classroom setting. I didn't like any of that, but having a Student Veterans' Organization and a place where I could talk to likeminded people, people that are, you know, same experiences as me and everything. That helped a lot that made having friends and people have talked to in a place to go between classes a lot easier. Because I, you know, I couldn't talk like this, you have a conversation with people 10 years younger than me or in all, its, that would fit in anywhere else. And you can identify very closely with other veterans. And it doesn't even matter, like the age gap between veterans, we all kind of have the same mentality about life and service and everything else like that we've got our own Sixth Sense of humor.

Jack provided a multi-faceted viewpoint on his intention to persist:

I know where I want to go and being able to structure and make things to make things a priority and follow through with them, and I can make that list, and I can do that rather successfully, I think, also being able to push myself of. I mean an undergrad it would be like this is art okay screw it. I'm going to go play x-box and or I'm going to go drinking with the buddies. Whereas, you know coming back from deployment it's like no, this is my goal, this is my objective in no matter how long it takes, or what it takes I'm going to get to this point. Being able to push through those hard things that are going on. To be able to reach that goal or objective.

The commitment expressed through the narratives by the student veterans reflect both types of commitment. Andrew's comments support Individual Intention and the comments of Bradley and Jack support Institutional Commitments. The commitment, though sometimes subtle, is internally driven by the student-veteran. The narratives reveal that there are several

influences that aid the student-veteran. An example of both types of commitment may be a student veteran seeking a career in public safety at an institution recognized for its programs.

Theme 2: Institutional Experiences

The Institutional Experiences contains two parts: Social Systems and Academic Systems. Both systems have formal and informal components. The Social System includes self-segregating activities such as a Veterans Service Organization and a Veterans Resource Center. The Academic System brings to light the need for alignment of programming to that of the incoming student veteran ranging from transition and orientation classes to faculty/staff interactions, learning communities, having classes with peers, and Vets tutoring Vets. It should be noted that there is a learning community at the four-year college where this research study was conducted. However, none of the student veteran residents from the learning community volunteered for this study.

Social Systems. This is clearly an individual issue. A few of the participants were attracted to participate heavily in social systems and were active in student veteran organizations. These participants viewed these social systems as an opportunity to bond with fellow students. Two participants who exhibited higher qualities of self-authoring were neutral on participating in institutional social systems and did not see a value in participating. Three participants veered away from these organizations entirely, addressing negative talk amongst those student veterans as their rationale for opting out. It is evident that this subject is open to interpretation since not all students approached this in a similar fashion. Clearly there is not a one size fits all.

Jack, an older veteran, had this opinion of some the social activities available at the of the Veteran Resource center:

I think the older veterans come in and use the resources that they need to be successful and then step out there, not necessarily there for. A lot of the social interaction, so that other stuff that's going on. It's hey I need a space to go on Saturday or potluck and I need some food because I don't want to go to campus dining facility and pay for it, or whatever it may be, but you're getting really good at just using the resources that you need to be successful and then moving on whereas I think that younger population would benefit from more structure.

Academic Systems. The participants encouraged institutions to reach out to military personnel before being discharged to capture those interested in attending a higher education institution prior to discharge from the military. Charles elaborated on why it is so critical:

It's important to have somebody to talk to when you're going back to school from deployment. I hear where people come back and they just isolate themselves. I was in that for about a month. I stayed at home and pretty much didn't do a whole lot, so I hear about the problems that happen 45-90 days out. That's when you see people having alcohol, substance abuse. It feels good when you get home to hang out with some friends and eventually that stuff goes away that “high” of being back. Then later, it's like wow, now I'm just back to being in society and things are really moving a lot slower, or I have too much time on my hands. I'm not accomplishing anything like that was important. As much as what I thought I was doing. And it was important at that time. So now, it's what do I do with my life on going back to school now? Okay, well, school doesn't start until fall. Okay, now I have a couple months to figure out what I'm going to do with it.

Sometimes people start to drink or do drugs or, you know, they had a guy that somebody they know who passed away or took their life already or was killed. It's like, depends on

what your deployment was like. I think and it is critical during that transition time to have people that care about you, and at least maintain some type of communication with the university is bet as well. I think it's important to start the conversations ahead of time.

Bradley, the youngest member of the research participants, had the following academic experience with the campus Student Veteran Organization:

You know, I wasn't, I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't like classroom setting. I didn't like any of that. But, having a student veterans' organization and a place where I could talk to like-minded people, people that are, you know, same experiences as me and everything. That helped a lot that made having friends and people have talked to in a place to go between classes a lot easier. Because I, I couldn't talk like this, you have a conversation with people 10 years younger than me or in all, its, that would fit in anywhere else. And you can identify very closely with other veterans.

The question of soliciting instructor/student veteran relations brought to the surface many varied reactions and comments. Jack had a negative experience. He recounted the following:

I had got kicked out of school the second time I enlisted so it was the National Guard, so I went I did my initial training. Came back and I did this another semester of school and then we deployed. So we only had one full set semester before deployment. I did better that time around. I think that was more of a willingness to put some structure into things into devote some time and to be able to focus on things as it was needed and be able to prioritize the correct stuff and I needed to. I still failed the class that would anger me. I had gotten an A in a class, but the teacher failed me because I only showed up for like you know less than whatever the criteria, was to pass the class. It was like Oh, are you

kidding me so the content wasn't hard, it was just showing up, and you know, putting the work in what got me a lot of the time.

Mark had the most intense academic experience:

I think frustration a part because I deal with that a lot right now just trying to learn this environment it's a totally different environment a learning environment, even from where I came from. You know, work with the instructors or whoever and they're getting frustrated with you because you're getting frustrated and it just it mounts up, and I think. one of my instructors is really good and kind of backed it off and said let's just stop a minute. We can't look backwards, we need to go look forward, and we can only move forward so let's move forward.

John stated that making a concerted effort to maintain good rapport with his professors helped him be successful in the classroom:

I feel like as long as you communicated well with your professors and your instructors, and let them know that hey, you know, on Friday of next month, I have drills so I won't be in your class, can I somehow make that up prior to the class taking place? I felt like I did really well at that and made sure my instructors were always aware of what was going on. So, I never had problems with them, which I know helps, you know, them respect the military.

How Institutions Can Improve Their Commitment to Student Veterans. Embedded within Theme 2, Institutional Commitments and Research Question 2, students provided information for how institutions could better improve commitment to student veterans. Jack commented on the need for improved understanding:

We know it's a resource, if you got free education, you might as well go back find a way to do it and make things work. I think there's a lot of very specialized resources out there for veterans, but I think if someone took them and just made a flowchart, of where to go for what.

Jack further commented on delays within the system:

You do find yourself talking to about 40 different people to try to make sure that things are going the way that they should be. As well as understanding, you know in my world for work it's like I have to respond to emails within 24 hours like that's my rule. You know from our professional standpoint, and it seems like the College takes anywhere from three days to three weeks to respond to this stuff sometimes.

Mark noted his desire for stronger camaraderie:

It's not about where you come from. You know what it is, is that you are a brotherhood or sisterhood, and we want you in it. I don't think that is very well promoted at this college right now, not that it won't in the future, but right now I don't see that.

Steven elaborated in greater potential areas for improvement:

A block of instruction just for student veterans that introduces them to the actual policies that the school has, as it pertains to student veterans. Or current service members that is too, so that way they have a better understanding of what is expected of them and what they're actually entitled to as far as accommodations go, because that's all stuff that I had to go and figure out on my own if nobody you know if nobody told me that the state has to make accommodations for you and there isn't any sort of.

Janet also commented on the need to flow chart the maze:

If there is a list of flow chart anything where you can follow, but not call a number and get sent to a place in another place. When there's not like a clear path to go through, people give up don't get to where they need to be. I am persistent, but I want to know what other people are doing to see if they're struggling as well I am. Maybe there's too much information so like things get kind of clouded and you're not quite sure what information to grasp or there's just like no information on where to go, so you kind of get bounced around. a little bit.

Although Janet spoke of an interrupted start, she emphasized the positive relations she had with her professors:

Without having that deployment, I think I would have gotten started my master degree a lot earlier so that definitely put a hinder and something that I wouldn't have been able to go to [Midwest Regional State University] and being deployed, and I feel for me having a home base is a lot more important, and I really do like the [Midwest Regional State University] and their professors, so I'm really glad that I'm able to do that.

Steven expressed frustration with the registration window:

I know, specifically for school it's mostly just registering for stuff while I'm overseas currently so, and you know coming back you know it's you're not always going to come back during a time when it's perfectly conducive when the registration window is open. You know people are going to be coming back in the middle of a semester, or something like that so it's figuring out figuring out the registration part could go into a figuring out all the benefits that you're entitled to, and what the process is.

Jack talked about the difficulties of reintegrating after a deployment:

A lot of people have issues reintegrating when they come back from a deployment: transition. Just readjust into everyday day to day life, you know as a as a civilian and all that stuff at school. It doesn't ever work out the way you want it to, so I guess it goes back to just helping manage expectations again.

John noted how hard it was to work with the different parties responsible for paying for his college and getting the tuition money:

I would say the benefits are challenging, you know, because you're dealing with money. The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Regional Coordinator is a big help with a lot of that stuff, but every, every military branch is a little different. The MN National Guard you can call. If you were like the Army Reserves, it was probably more challenging because they have a smaller office.

Each student veteran contributed a different thought as to how to improve the institution and of what a perfect institution would look like from their experiences. Some responses were vague and participants spoke in generalities; other responses were more explicit. The graduate students who may have been deployed more than once provided more detailed information than the undergraduates who had served only one deployment.

Theme 3: Development and Integration

The theme Development and Integration encompasses three elements: Academic Development, Career Services, and Campus development. This is also coupled with elements of Reformulate Goals and Commitments (Intentions, Goal and Institutional Commitments, and External Commitments).

Tinto (1993) asserted that at some point the student-veteran will de-emphasize the self-segregation of peer-only actions and evolve into academic and social communities that drive the

need for social and academic communities. It is interesting to note that not one of the nine participants participated in a learning community on campus. The participants found other means of social connectedness for academic success.

Mark spoke candidly and optimistically of his concern and voiced this request for the faculty and administration:

I just hope that more instructors can recognize some of the symptoms of when a veteran is having a really bad day, because some of them have really bad days, and they just skip class instead of going knowing that they will be intimidated from that. Because they're not being helped, they don't learn, they're not learning.

Relating to student-student interactions, one participant stated:

As veterans in a classroom setting, I mean there'll be there'll be other students who are, you know, obviously fresh out of high school. You know they'll just like scoff because you know it seems like to them it's it seems like, you know, some older person that's kind of stuck in the past, trying to. It's hard to hard to elaborate on this topic, but you know they automatically just make up their assumptions as soon as they hear that someone's a veteran.

Larry bluntly stated this about student-student interaction:

The students made it difficult to sit through class sometimes because, not because the way they treated me, but I had a whole different perspective on the world and maturity. Other immature, fresh out of high school type students, drove me crazy and you know later I got some help from the VA. On some of those things, but it I understood, there was a discrepancy or parity or something you know, there was a difference between me and the way I viewed the world the way I acted mature more than a lot of the other students.

Larry offered a different perspective on the same issue:

Even though they're very close in age and that's very, very typical, and that's very similar to what I was talking about in that first semester after the deployment. I felt I was so disconnected as a student. In personality or just social in social being. I couldn't connect to, that you can't relate to. You know it's impossible to befriend or relate to some of these kids. Yet, I probably could with another veteran because since the same lived experiences. Like a Brotherhood.

A critical component to prevent attrition, Development and Integration serves as a means to prevent attrition. From the above narratives, it can be concluded that as important as it is, there is no clear formula to determine what approach will best serve the student veteran. Successful programs will have several options available to best meet the diversity of their particular needs.

Intentions and Goals, Institutional Commitments, and External Intentions. The Reformulate Goals and Commitments contains three parts: (a) Intentions and Goals, (b) Institutional Commitments, and (c) External Intentions. Each provides a different perspective, and when combined, the combination acts to reinforce the decision to persist. At this point in the student veterans' educational experience, other factors introduce themselves. These external drivers have impact in the continual decision to persist or to depart. In regard to Reformulating Goal and Commitments, all nine participants encountered this issue at least once within higher education, with six of the nine achieving completion.

Intentions and Goals. Janet recounted the following story to explain how she reformulated her goals and commitments:

When I was young, a lot of my friends lived in a trailer park and I lived in a house just outside of it. So it was like I was the rich kid because I lived in a house. When growing

seeing the living situations, just a bad environment they were in, I felt like being a social worker. I think I would be able to more break the circle of like substance abuse. I joined the military to go to school. I never went through high school thinking about going to college. I don't know what it was, but I felt like it's something that everyone should do. My parents were more like you should do a technical college. Okay, so yeah when I started at a community college because I didn't want to take the test to get into college, so that was my path to a liberal arts degree. My dreams to help children, so social work was something I always wanted to do, but I don't think I really felt a passion for like this is what I'm going to do at that time and tell probably when I spoke to the vocational counselor who is able to really was able to focus in one direction rather than like being all over the place. I don't think so. I think what more changed for me was my age, so when I went to school for my age and bachelor is, I was in my early 20s and now 10 years later I'm getting my masters so I'm just in a different spot in my life, where my focus has been different, but I think I still have to like work harder than most people just by the fact of like you know I didn't do very well in high school, but with the military I'm able to sit down and put in the extra work to get the mission accomplished, rather than just comparing myself to others.

Institutional Commitments. Charles provided the following closing thought on his expectations from his institution and peers:

I know a lot of veterans, most of the time they will say they don't want that as we don't want people's pity. We don't want people feeling bad, for you know, our service, or you when we're in this war, that war. World War Two, they had, you know, greatest generation, there's a lot of praise for that generation. Vietnam, we treated them

improperly, unfairly, so how can we make it up to them? Korea? It's almost like nobody talks about Korea, you know, you can go on and on. Then you get to the wars now, it's like, we either say thanks or thank you. And we that's all we do. Or Wow, you have you have some troubles. You know, it's, how can we help? And so it's kind of weird, I think a weird. It's kind of a weird area, gray area, because we didn't we either say thank you, or we feel bad for veterans sometimes. They don't want you to feel pity for them.

Each participant had their own unique perspective on the commitments to their own respective goals. Their attitudes may have been fostered from earlier academic readiness or a stronger desire to move forward in their lives and accept roles of greater responsibilities.

External Intentions. Allen talked about his experiences in high school and college and how he lacked the motivation to be more successful. He said:

I hated high school. I graduated by the skin of my teeth, not because it wasn't intelligent, but because I didn't do any of the work. The only reason I graduated high school was because I cheated on my tests and exams. I did zero homework when I was in high school. I skipped class most the time. In college, those first few classes there were you know, the liberal arts kind of thing. So you know, as a student was just practice practicing the language with other students and you know, taking quizzes, writing something in English and then writing the same thing in German and that was just boring. It was just such as boring. Like it was it was negative experience for me. I didn't like classroom settings when I was in high school, and I sure as hell didn't like it when I was in the Army.

Maturity. Three of the participants had a common theme in their narratives, that of maturity. All three used recurring words to describe maturity as growing up and facing life-

experiences. Each participant described in their own varied ways how a deployment to a war changed them. The commonality was that by no design of their own, they each experienced the atrocities of a war zone. This shifted their worldview, how they think, and how they act. Bradley put it this way:

I think I get a lot more respect for that. Not necessarily because a little better it was because it was driven of your classmates. The faculty definitely treat me differently, but in a positive way. They talk to me like a peer instead of a student. My work experience on top of that, I worked a little bit before I had been to college. I think I'm more relatable to a lot of my professors. Lot of professors either have kids that are in the military, they were in the military themselves in some country or outside of here. So yeah, they see me in this humorous and up here instead of a student.

Allen said:

I don't know how much of it is directly because the military and how much of it is just me getting older and maturing. But I would say for sure, the experiences that I had, and being away from home and having to be kind of more self-reliant. And having a deployment to Afghanistan. And just yeah, especially being in the Marine Corps, and just kind of having to deal with a lot of the stresses and, you know, things like that, that come with that lifestyle, I think definitely helped me kind of grow up and mature.

Charles added this about his feelings on maturity:

I guess just being in another country like Iraq, and seeing what has gone on over that time frame for since 2002-2003, that we have been there for such a long time. And knowing how many deaths occurred there and you know, seeing what was going on. It just was a difficult time to come back to that because you know exactly what you're

going to be doing every single day. With your mission, you know exactly what you're supposed to do. You're fed, everything, you've dressed everything you're paid. I mean, you know everything what's going to happen with your day, except for one, shit goes wrong. So the problem for me was when I came back and for many veterans is that they have a hard time transitioning back into civilian life where I gotta wake up on my own, I got nobody in a bunk next to me to, you know, convince me to get up. Nobody's gonna make you food, but he's gonna dress either tell you what to wear. I got my own time on my hands. So, the routine is was a little different. And it took a while. But the biggest thing that I mean that I would say that encouraged me to keep on in school, because of my deployment was the GI Bill and I had it benefit to us, so I know I had to do I needed to use those benefits when I got back to complete my school.

Although the participants each had unique educational backgrounds and experiences, there is a synonymous message in that each experienced personal change. Individual maturity, as described by these three participants, is synonymous to the Cornerstone concept as discussed by Livingston et al. (2011).

Conclusions

In reference to Theme 1 Goals/Commitments, it is apparent that pre-entry attributes as discussed in the literature review have a significant role in the success of the student veteran. The lack of academic preparedness poses significant challenges as identified by three participants. However, this challenge is overcome by their inner drive to succeed. It can be understood that the instilled military values prevent failure of mission, where in this case their goal is now their education. The inner drive to succeed overcomes the fear of failure.

Relative to Theme 2 Institutional Commitments, the Midwest regional state university provides a wide variety of programs to support to the education student veteran, although not all student veterans use all forms of support. Examples include the living learning community, funded positions, office areas, student-veteran organization, and monthly activities and events. Due to the variety of needs, the level of support is seen as favorable in the eyes of the student veterans.

In Theme 3 Goals and Intentions, narratives relating to persistence shed light on the different form of commitment for the student-veteran. Evidence from this theme indicates the need for ongoing socialization that can be in the form of with fellow veterans, peers, mentors, faculty, or staff. All the participants indicated a connectedness to others as a factor of their success. The commonality of this factor may warrant further investigation.

A number of conclusions can be made from these narratives. The narratives from this research project align and supplement the existing body of research relating to student veterans found in Chapter 2 Literature Review. The broad spectrum of responses is also a reflection of the diverse of personalities and states of preparedness, which then drives the need for a wide variety of services for the student veteran to be successful. The success of these student veterans may lay with their own motivation and locus of control. However, their success is also dependent upon the institutional commitment and support.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this Narrative Inquiry research was to study the experiences and effects of deployment on the student veteran returning to higher education to identify strategies and potential improvements to improve persistence and completion rates of student veterans. A qualitative study in educational research provides an opportunity for the researcher to capture the data from many different methods and perspectives. In the current study, a qualitative method allowed selected student veterans to describe and share their narratives of pursuing a degree at a four-year institution. The primary method of data collection was the recording transcription and analysis of oral interviews conducted with the nine participants. The results from this study can offer insight for educational leadership to provide stronger support for student veterans and strengthen existing strategies to increase student veteran persistence to graduation.

This final chapter is organized in the following way: a summary of findings as to the research question within the conceptual framework, a comparison between the research findings and current literature, research implications for practice, limitations for future research, and a conclusion.

Summary of Findings

Chapter Four organized the results of the data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 discusses how the results of the study align to the theoretical framework as supported by the works of DiRamio (2011). A summation of all the themes brings to light an intensity in the student veterans and an inward, intense focus to accomplish their personal missions. The motivation of the student veteran appears over and over from the beginning of their educational journeys to their enrollment into the academy to completion of the pursued degree. This inner

drive is further underscored from other factors of maturity found in the research participants and their educational goals.

Findings from RQ1: What influence does deployment have on the student veteran returning to higher education?

One theme that emerged immediately from all nine participants was an increased level of self-confidence where student veterans were able to relate and transfer their military experiences into their roles as students in higher education. All nine participants used their experiences as a foundation for their later success. This developed their locus of control. Five participants spoke of the discipline learned in the military, two others spoke of its structure, while two others referenced survival and the execution of an objective to completion. All spoke of small tasks leading to larger tasks and of informal and formal leadership roles, which translated to being natural leaders in the classroom.

Another prominent theme that emerged was the level of support that the student veterans received with enrollment issues, guidance, mentoring, and conflict resolution. Participants universally praised the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs, its Regional Coordinator, and the Director of the Veterans Resource Center for their work at the Midwest regional state university for their efforts in helping student veterans succeed. For the participants who were able to communicate effectively with their professors, praise was given to the faculty in resolving conflicts with attendance, classroom performance, and military obligations. Unfortunately, the student veteran/faculty relationship was not always perfect. Two participants spoke of less than positive relationships with faculty. Without the ability to investigate further, it is not possible to determine where the breakdown in communication may have occurred between these participants and the respective faculty members.

There are several evident connections between the literature review, the theoretical framework, Research Question 1, and the participants' interviews. Through the association of these four areas, a strong relationship emerged that supports the theoretical framework of this research project. First, we see a connection in transition; the abrupt absence of structure and a regimented schedule is a difficult adjustment for student veterans and can be overwhelming to those who are not prepared for it (Briggs, 2012; Hart & Thompson, 2013; Olsen et al., 2014).

A second connection is that many student veterans have matured beyond their traditional classroom peers due to immersion to military actions and deployments. Student veterans are known to have difficulty socializing and may exhibit a lower level of patience with their peers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Vacchi, 2012; Vacchi & Berger 2014; Wurster et al., 2013).

The third connection with the literature is the difficulty of transitions. Research supports that the student veteran has two transitions to make: (a) the transition from service member to civilian, and (b) the transition from civilian to student (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This is especially relevant to members of the Reserves or National Guard for whom education is often interrupted with one or more deployments (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Finally, an association with far reaching implications is the connection between student veterans and health concerns. It is common for veterans to have mental health issues resulting from deployments. As discussed earlier, of the veterans from OEF/OIF who are not students, 20% report mental health issues (Currier et al., 2018), while nearly 35% of student veterans report severe anxiety, and 24% report severe depression (Rudd et al., 2011). Today's student veterans are returning from the OIF and OEF having faced a different battlefield than soldiers of the past. These modern engagements are "boots on the ground" conflicts that are prolonged and

extensive. This results in greater risk for physical damage (injuries, environmental conditions, chemical exposure, Traumatic Brain Disorders) and mental health issues associated with PTSD and other invisible injuries (Campbell & Riggs, 2015).

These connections found in the literature review, the participants' interviews, and Research Question 1 are not complete. In addition to the associations already discussed, student veterans face other issues such as being a first-generation college student, coming from a low income household, prolonged legal issues, lack of access to resources, and in some cases academic under preparedness from gaps between formal academics. These issues, as identified in the Chapter 2 Literature and presented by the participants on Chapter 4 Findings, provide legitimacy to previous research, while at the same time raise new issues about the interpretation of the data.

Findings from RQ2: What has the institution done for the student veteran to help them reach their educational goals?

The open-ended questions of the survey instrument were written and asked so that the information identifying the positive aspects could easily be identified. Additionally, as a means of validity, the participants were asked what could be done to improve the institution.

The Midwest regional state university where the study took place has a long history of student veteran enrollment. The institution has maintained a student-veteran population since the end of World War II, with later waves of the student veteran population occurring following the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War and again in the decade following the conflicts in the middle-east.

Current Programs Available to Student Veterans at Their Institution. Presently there are numerous programs that focus on the student veteran and academics. Peer Mentor Program is

a program that connects student veterans with a peer mentor and attend weekly virtual career fairs. Military and Veteran Connected Orientation is a program that runs during the first four days of the semester to ensure a smooth transition into academic life. Additionally, the Veterans Resource Center and the Veterans Service Organization support the social needs of the student veteran on campus.

The interviews revealed that all that participated had participated in at least one of the services on their campus. This included the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Administration (VA) Educational Benefit Coordinator, the VA Vocational Rehabilitation, the VA Certifying Official for initial processing and enrollment, and later the Campus Veterans Resource Center for ongoing support. Consistent to existing literature, younger student veterans were more likely to utilize the Veteran Resource Center for gathering spaces and camaraderie amongst fellow student veterans. Five of the student Veterans spoke of the Director of the Veteran Resource Center who had worked as an advocate on their behalf in addressing instructor concerns, attendance issues, academic performance, academic probation, legal issues, transportation issues, financial issues, and service animals.

As a reflection of the strong commitment within the past decade, the institution has received four awards of distinction: College Best for Vets by *Military Times* magazine, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Minnesota National Guard, Military Friendly Top 10 School, and College of Distinction Military Support. These are just a few of the awards earned through the efforts of the Director of Veterans Resource Center.

Ways the Institution Could Improve in its Goal to Help Student Veterans. To further improve the institution in helping the student veteran reach their goals of persistence to a degree, the research participants were asked what institution could do to improve the institution to aid

the student veteran. The resounding suggestion for improvement revolved around the complexities of processing benefits for student veterans.

The underlying commonality with all the participants was frustration with the complexity of the process of using veteran benefits to attend college. More than one participant expressed this frustration. Janet said, “The complexity of benefits is overwhelming. Maybe there’s too much information so things get kind of clouded and not quite sure what information to grasp or there’s just like no information on where to go.” Jack also found his situation overwhelming. He said, “You do find yourself talking to about 40 different people to try to make sure that things are going the way that they should be.”

The tasks associated with federal and state systems as well as that of the administration of the university are often difficult, and coordination between them is not always possible. Steven pointed this out when he said:

I know, specifically for school it's mostly just registering for stuff while I'm overseas currently so, and you know coming back you know it's you're not always going to come back during a time. Where it's perfectly conducive where. The registration window is open, you know a lot of times you know people are going to be coming back in the middle of a semester, or something like that so it's figuring out figuring out the registration part could go into a figuring out all the benefits that you're entitled.

When asked what the University can do to improve its services, some participants were quick to offer praise. The Director of the Veterans Resource Center was credited for acting as a mediator on the behalf of Mark when he had issues with an instructor, while another student praised the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Regional Coordinator for assisting in his

enrollment problems. Indirectly, these students indicated that overall, the university is doing well by providing support services.

All nine of student-veteran narratives were positive about how the university supports their academic program. University staff is addressing their issues, and only one student commented on calls not being returned in a timely manner. When referencing university faculty, three of the nine expressed some frustrations with faculty, one with grading, one in regard to communication, and one in not understanding attendance accommodations to training activities.

In conclusion, the narratives of the participant are grounded in and support the theoretical framework of this research project. Numerous statements provide evidence relevant to each major theme: (a) Goals/Commitments, (b) Institutional Commitment, and (c) Development and Integration. Collectively, the narratives from the participants answer of the research questions: RQ1: What influence does deployment have on the student veteran returning to higher education? and RQ2: What has the institution done for the student veteran to help them reach their educational goals.

Implications for Theory

I used the theoretical framework from *Transition 2.0: A Theoretical Critique of Tinto's Model for Exploring Student-Veteran Persistence* (DiRamio, 2011) to serve as the framework for the student veteran research participant interviews. This framework represents a foundation for the elements of critical to the success of the student veteran. This section describes how the findings support the framework. These connections relate to the previous theme discussion presented earlier.

Implication for Theory Theme 1: Goals/Commitments

Transitional Adjustments. The first theme, Theme 1: Goals/Commitments, revealed that the participants faced difficulties in transitions as they had two transitions to make: (a) the transition from service member to civilian, and (b) the transition from civilian to student. These transitions speak of the unique hardship experienced as veterans return to social norms (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). To further complicate these transitions, student veterans often come from families with lower incomes, single-parent status, lack of parental education, and lower high school scores than their non-veteran peers (MacLean, 2005).

Each student veteran had their own story of transition. Two of the students had very few issues, whereas seven had moderate to significant issues. The participants who experienced moderate issues with transitions identified the military, veteran services, and academic systems as problematic. While deployed overseas and preparing to return (from overseas or being discharged) it is difficult to have a seamless transition to school enrollment. Between the applying for VA funding, graduate school enrollment, and payment, one participant said they lost a half a year waiting. This was a contributing factor leading to their depression.

Typical transitional adjustments were reported by the remaining participants. For example, when returning to school, the mental expectation is to see everything the same upon return, where in actuality the longer one is away the greater the changes. Three participants lost close family members and two of the nine went through a divorce from their spouse while deployed, which are factors associated with guilt and depression.

External Commitments. Goals and Commitments are influenced by other external commitments. These external commitments can be a spouse and/or children, National Guard

obligations or duty in the Reserves, as well as any other additional responsibilities. With a record number of deployments and activations, it has become a significant challenge to maintain work and an education.

Implications for Theory Theme 2: Institutional Commitment

The second theme, Theme 2 Institutional Commitment, speaks to the need of institutional support. The institution is needed to react to and accommodate to the needs of returning student veterans since the average student veteran is 33 years old, meaning the student veteran could typically incur a fifteen-year gap between their secondary education and higher education (Kim & Cole, 2013). This time gap contributes to a decay in the skill set for academic success. As stated in the literature review and confirmed by the research participants, this causes the student veteran to become disconnected from a normal college experience as enjoyed by their traditional peers. Two of the nine student veterans participants spoke of changing their major stemming from academic decay associated from deployments. This is just one factor that leads to a higher education attrition rate of 51% (Cate, 2014). This existing research is consistent to the six-year graduation rate of 45% for this Midwest regional state university.

Academic Performance and Co-curricular Activities. In regard to Academic performance, a student veteran learning community provides a community where all the students are student veterans who live and study together. This living arrangement offers a cohesive social model, an opportunity for veterans to academically support one another, and removes the issues of integrating with traditional students in personal spaces (De La Garza et al., 2016). A living and learning community is currently active at this Midwest regional state university. However, none of the participants in the study belonged to a learning community, although two

participants were familiar with them and spoke of them being helpful for student veterans who suffer from a lack structure (Kirchner, 2015).

Implications for Theory Theme 3: Development and Integration

Theme 3, Development and Integration, is about how there are times when the student veteran has difficulties relating to the average traditional student. This was stated by Kraines in 1945 who noted that student veterans must mature quickly on the battlefield (Kraines, 1945) and as a result might view other traditional students as immature when fully engaged in their academics (DiRamio et al., 2008). The mismatch in academic devotion is a cause of frustration that can be interpreted as being unwilling to be a team member in group projects.

This dichotomy of maturity in the classroom was described by three participants as a significant issue; five were neutral on the issue, and one student used it to their advantage. A mitigating factor in this area is the age of the student body within the classroom. The participant who noted the greatest divergence in maturity with their peers was enrolled in a classroom of traditional-aged freshman students; this experience later led to counseling for the participant. Two participants expressed frustration with fellow classmates on team attendance and team assignments, with one participant stating, “I am tired of always being sought to be the team leader due to my age or military experience.” One participant found the maturity to be an advantage when this student ended up being the youngest in a night class setting of non-traditional middle-aged classmates.

Practical Implications

A clearer understanding of student veteran experiences can aid in increasing student veteran retention, improving their relationships with staff and faculty, and helping them develop long term relationships with the institution. From the results of this analysis, I suggest that

administrators consider further exploring and researching this group of students. Those student veterans who participated in this research project included current undergraduate students, graduate students, and students who received their degree within the last ten years. For this reason, I further propose exploring the entire student veteran body, including those currently enrolled as well as exit interviews for those who decide to no longer persist.

There are several practical recommendations to improve the institution's effort to attract and retain a larger number of student veterans based from the participants' narratives. First, an improved pre-return outreach process where the institution reaches out to the soon-to-be-returning student veteran could enhance administrative preparedness for the active soldiers intending to enroll within a semester. Next, institutions should consider developing an administrative training segment on the roles and responsibilities of the university to accommodate the student veteran. This would improve awareness for the faculty who have little or no military exposure. Additionally, institutions should actively promote administrative involvement in regard to student veteran orientation. Research has shown that student veterans who have clear and open communication in advance with their classroom instructors tend to have a better overall experience. Last, but not least, instructions for applying for veteran education benefits needs to be streamlined and simplified for student veterans. One participant suggested creating a flow chart that a student can follow that can provide a visual sequence of tasks that need to be completed in order for benefits to be applied in a timely manner.

To maximize the return on effort by this Midwest regional state university, the literature review and participants' narratives support greater involvement by the university. However, prior to doing so and using most current data, expand the use of student surveys to develop faculty and staff guidance materials. The importance of this was revealed when some participants spoke of

the stress with faculty relations that had occurred up to ten years ago. Since there is a great latency, this information may be less relevant at the present time with current students speaking of different experiences. An annual survey will provide more timely data that can provide a greater value in the identification of staff and faculty relations and support.

A practical recommendation I suggest includes preparing and distributing clear guidelines for students and instructors. In recruiting students, developing outreach materials, and fostering communications to ensure a smooth transition from the military to a four-year institution . Current students need a clear road map or flow chart, including fostering relations with staff and faculty. The development and ongoing delivery of faculty and staff training where a better understanding may take shape. There are many unknowns on both the student veteran and on the part of staff and faculty which may hinder the success of the student veteran. We cannot assume student veterans and faculty understand best practices of each other.

Limitations

In relation to the limitations previously identified in Chapter 1, other limitations arose in the early stages of the research. One limitation was the small number of participants. Although numerous methods were employed to recruit participants, a desired demographic representation was not achieved. The lack of willingness to participate is believed to be related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on educational programming and people's ability to participate in social activities. Another limitation is the generalizability of the results. The small participant size in the study does not reflect the total student veteran population at the institution where the study was conducted. This may lead to difficulty in replicating the results of the interviews, interpretations, and the creation of themes. Consequently, the results of this research project may not be generalizable to a larger population of student veterans.

There are items of concern to many student veterans that are not relevant at the Midwest regional university. As discussed earlier, student veterans are prone to being exploited for the generous benefits they receive. Some student veterans are aggressively recruited into programs lacking certification or accreditation or to institutions with high tuition rates. However, the nine student veterans who participated in the study did not indicate any issues in this area. Their Midwest regional state university prides itself on the accreditation of academic programs.

The era of COVID-19 also impacted the researcher's ability to engage qualified subjects for this research project. Although the pilot study and framework for this study were pre-COVID, the majority of activities occurred at the height of the pandemic. Meetings with students were either cancelled or postponed, and when held the meetings had low attendance. Usual gathering places for student veterans such as the student veteran resource center were either closed or curtailed. This made it more difficult to meet and speak with potential participants. To accomplish reaching the student veterans willing to participant adjustments were necessary in the recruiting of potential student veterans.

Additionally, isolation impacted some student veterans more than others during the COVID pandemic. Unlike the pilot study where the willingness to participate was notably higher, interest to participate was near nonexistent once the pandemic restrictions were fully in place. The participants of the pilot study were also less distracted and exhibited a greater willingness to participate. The eventual participants in the study were deeply interested in benefitting future student veterans while following safety and health protocols.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was confined to students who are either currently enrolled or who have already persisted through degree completion at a single Midwest regional state university. To

broaden the understanding of the student veteran experience, future studies could include students who are intermittent, those on academic probation, and those students who did not persist. Additionally, future studies could focus on successful currently enrolled student veterans. Student veterans living and studying with the Learning Living community may provide greater insight of student veterans and their sense of belonging and mattering. Another potential study would be a longitudinal study. Student veterans could be identified and interviewed at the start of their college career and then interviewed again when they either graduate or choose to discontinue their pursuit of a college degree. With research questions asked at the beginning and at the end of their college tenure, details may be more easily remembered and may provide more information on any effects of deployment. This would help provide greater awareness to the administration to prevent future stop-losses of this student population. For those student veterans who are not able to maintain enrollment, research may provide greater insight as to what additional programming may be necessary assist them in their persistence efforts.

Conclusion

This research project brings together many of the issues that confront the student veteran in the pursuit of their educational goals. The literature review identified in detail many of the issues that emerge from pre-entry attributes, academic preparedness, hidden agendas, student and faculty relations, and ongoing enrollment. Although these issues have been identified by several authors over the last decade, the issues remain relevant to the student-veterans of today. The literature review provides a foundation for the participant narratives and supports the three themes as discussed.

These narratives also identify items not fully explored by previous researchers. A recurrent issue in the current study is the need for a more seamless transition process for student

veterans. This can take many forms. A flowchart or road map was suggested by several of the study participants to help communicate the order of steps needed to obtain and use educational benefits. This could become part of an institution's pre-boarding and orientation for student veterans. Faculty and staff awareness of the military experience and transition obstacles may also alleviate stress for the student veteran in the classroom.

The student veterans who participated in this study are an inspiration and a source of motivation for future student veterans. The successes of these nine student veterans, who generously gave of their time for this research project, are inspiring and are a positive reflection on this University. However, stronger academic support systems (offices and meeting areas, qualified staff, and programming) need to be prioritized to complement the efforts and internal motivation of student veterans in order for them to achieve success in degree completion. As future challenges arise within this segment of the student population, the institutions need to remain flexible in their support by adapting and evolving to address the changing needs of student veterans.

For nearly eight decades, this Midwest regional state university has educated thousands of student veterans. A number of them did not persist for a wide variety of reasons, and the current graduation rate remains lower for student veterans than for their non-military peers. Fortunately, over the last eight decades, many inroads have been made to assist the student veteran in the betterment of their lives. With the findings from this study and the potential for future studies, it is hoped that with greater understanding the necessary programs and support systems will be identified and implemented to help student veterans persist to degree completion and reap the life-long benefits of having a college degree.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter to Participants

August 1, 2021

Dear Student Veteran,

My name is Gary Nierengarten, I am a veteran from the Viet Nam Era (U.S. Army from 1974 to 1976) and am a Saint Cloud State University (SCSU) alumnus, Bachelor's degree in 1980 and an MBA in 1997. I am a civilian worker at Camp Ripley, and I serve as an Adjunct Instructor at St. Cloud State University.

To become a better instructor for the students I serve, I am pursuing a Doctorate degree in Higher Education Administration with an interest in how higher education can better serve the student veteran population. As I have completed my coursework, I am now entering the research phase of my program where I need to interview student-veterans, and then interpret the results for meaning. These interviews will then become the basis of the research project that I am working on entitled, Influence of deployment on the returning student veteran at a four-year institution.

To complete the research project I described above, I am seeking eight to ten service members or veterans of any branch, that have attended at least one semester of any higher education institution, served in a deployment (possibly Afghanistan or Iraq), and returned to higher education as a full-time student here at SCSU. The participants will be asked a set of questions about experiences that changed their feelings toward education, fellow students, and faculty. This is to find out how the deployment affects the academics of a veteran.

The interviews will take approximately two hours. As a requirement in this research, the interview will be recorded, and statements will then be summarized. To ensure trustworthiness, the participants will have opportunities to look at the interview transcript, notes, and the completed research paper. Your names are not used anywhere in the research paper, and your anonymity will be safeguarded.

Since this a small research project, there is no direct compensation will be provided to you, the participant, for your time. However, a donation of \$50 will be made on behalf of each participant, not to exceed \$500, to the Saint Cloud State University Veteran Resource Center Emergency Fund. Since this research project will become a public document. This research may become available to be used to improve our campus for future veteran students.

If you wish to participate, please contact me by email at gjnierengarten@stcloudstate.edu.

If you should have any questions about the study, you can reach my faculty advisor Dr. Steven McCullar, at slmmccullar@statecloudstate.edu.

directly at smcullar@stcloudstate.edu

Thank you in advance, and all the best to everyone's studies.

With Best Regards,

Gary J. Nierengarten
U.S. Army Veteran

Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

Adult Informed Consent

Title: Influence of deployment on the returning student veteran to a four-year institution

Primary Investigator: Gary J. Nierengarten, MBA

Advising Professor: Dr. Steven McCullar

Telephone: 320-241-0081

Introduction

At present, there is a lack of current academic research of local student-veterans who have been deployed, served in a combat role, and returned to higher education. Research has been conducted in other locations at different points of time, yet no research exists at Saint Cloud State University. This research study will focus on the veteran students that have attended at least one semester of higher education, served in a combat role, and return to fulltime status at Saint Cloud State University.

Participants will have served in either served in Iraq during the Iraq Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Campaign or Afghanistan during the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Campaign.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic performance of student veterans resulting from combat duty. This study will explore the feelings of the participants by means of qualitative research to determine if their academic performance may have changed, resulting from combat duty. For the purposes of this study, academic performance, in addition to their grades, is how the veteran feels, their grades, relationships to other students, and treatment by their professors.

Study Procedures

The study will consist of ten participants who will be asked a series of questions relating to their experiences, and if there is a perceived effect on their academic performance. The participants will be volunteers contacted by the Saint Cloud State University Veterans Resource Center to ascertain if they are interested in participating in this research. Each participant will be asked as a series of questions about how they feel about their experiences. Their experiences will be electronically recorded and transcribed. The findings from each interview will be coded and analyzed. For the purposes of transparency and accuracy, the participant will have the opportunity to review the findings.

Risks and Discomforts

It is believed that this study should not generate any undue risk or discomfort. There are no known physical risks of this study. With respect to mental risks of this project, you may stop this research project for any reason, and if you find discomfort in speaking of your experiences. There are no known side effects of this research. Reasonable precautions will be taken to minimize risk to you.

If you need help, please seek the assistance of any of these agencies;

Saint Cloud State University Counseling and Psychological Services,
(320) 308-3171

<https://www.stcloudstate.edu/counseling/default.aspx>

Saint Cloud State University Veterans Resource Center, 1(320) 308-2185

<https://www.stcloudstate.edu/veterans/default.aspx>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.) Crisis Line 1 (800) 273-8255 (press 1)

Benefits

There will not be direct compensation to the participant. The SCSU Veterans Resource Center will receive a donation for this study, as described below. Indirectly, future student-veterans may benefit from any programs that assist the student-veterans resulting in this research project.

Compensation

A donation to the Saint Cloud State University Veterans Resource Center Emergency Fund of \$50 for each participant completing this study for a total of \$500

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the information gathered during your participation in this study will be maintained. Your personal identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified by your name in any published material. All data will be kept in a file cabinet in a locked office.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researchers.

The study investigator may stop your participation at any time without your consent for the following reasons: if it appears to be medically harmful to you if you fail to follow directions for participating in the study if the study is canceled, or for reasons deemed appropriate by the research coordinator to maintain subject safety and the integrity of the study.

Contact Information

If you have any additional questions, please contact the researcher at (320) 241-0081 or gjnierengarten@stcloudstate.edu or the advisor, Dr. Steven McCullar, at (303) 308-4727 or slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu.

Acceptance to participate in the Veteran Student study

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or obligation after signing this form.

Participant Name
(Printed)_____

Participant Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix C: SCSU IRB Release Form

Research Study: Influence of deployment on the returning student veteran to a four-year institution

Release Form for Use of Photograph/Video/Audio Recording

Gary J. Nierengarten

Researcher's Email Address: gjnierengarten@stcloudstate.edu

Dr. Steven McCullar

Supervisor's Email Address: slmccullar@stcloudstate.edu

Please Print:

Participant Name

Legal Representative if Applicable

This form asks for your consent to use media for and from this study. We would like you to indicate how we can use your media. On the next page is a list of media types that we will use. Please initial where you consent for that type of use of your media. Legal representative initials will provide consent when needed.

Regardless of your answers on the next page, you will not be penalized.

We will not use your media in any way you have not initialed.

Questions regarding this form should be directed to the researchers. Additional answers can be found by contacting the IRB Administrator or an IRB Committee Member. Current membership is available at: <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/irb/members.aspx>

A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

Video with audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

Transcription of audio	
Consent Granted	Type of Release
	Used by research team to record and analyze data

I have read the above carefully and give my consent only for those items in which I initialed.

Participant Signature (if 18 years of age or older)

Date

Participant Name (Printed)

WHEN CONSENT IS NEEDED FROM A LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE, COMPLETE THIS SECTION. UP TO TWO LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE MAY SIGN.

Legal Representative Signature

Date

Legal Representative Name (Printed)

Second Legal Representative Signature

Date

Second Legal Representative Name (Printed)

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire

Research Study:

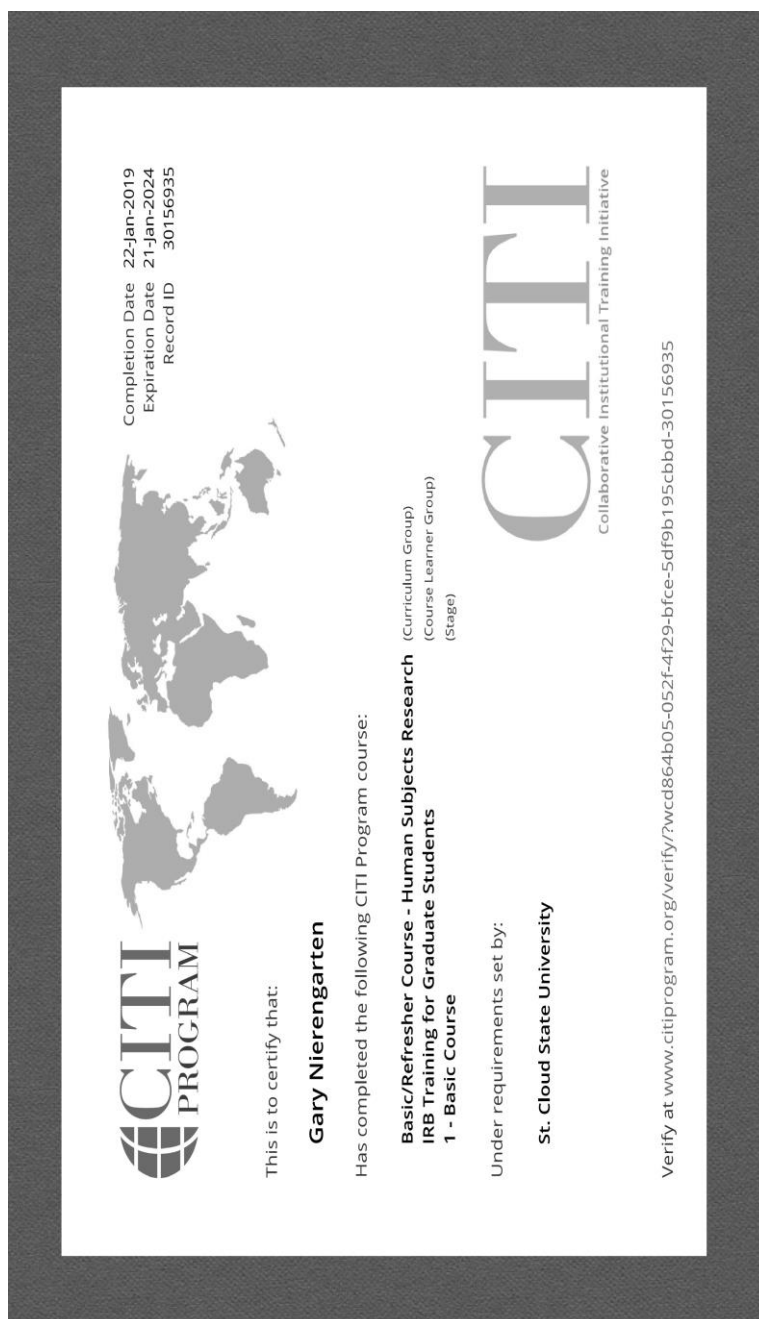
Influence of deployment on the returning student veteran to a four-year institution

Participant Questions

The participants will be provided with a consent form. An Institution Review Board approved Protocol and the following questions.

1. To begin with, how long were you attending college prior to joining prior to military service?
2. Prior to joining the military, how would you describe yourself?
3. Could you tell me about your educational experiences in high school?
4. At what point did you decide to go to college?
5. Can you tell describe to me why you joined the military?
6. When you started college, what area interest or major were you pursuing, and has that changed since the tour of duty?
7. Describe for me, If you could please, your experiences as a student before your deployment?
8. What experiences did you encounter from deployment that may influence your enrollment in college?
9. How have these experiences had any impact on your; grades, self-confidence, or relations with other students and professors?
10. Are you still pursuing the same major/undecided, and if changed, could you explain why?
11. Tell me about a time when you thought about college and how returning to college would be different?
12. How do you feel as a student-veteran you are treated differently by your class members because of your military service?
13. Has your academic performance changed since returning from the deployment?
14. As a student veteran what would you change at this institution?
15. What are some the roadblocks you faced upon return that you had to overcome by yourself?
16. Did I miss anything that you feel is important as a student veteran that I did not ask?

Appendix E: Certificate of Completion: SCSU IRB CITI Human Resource Curriculum



Appendix F: SCSU IRB Research Project Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th

Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Gary Nierengarten
Email: gjnierengarten@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION:

Exempt Review

Project Title Influence of Deployment on the Returning Student Veteran to a Four Year Institution
Advisor Steven McCullar

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

If a platform such as Zoom is used to record interviews, you are encouraged to connect with SCSU IT for appropriate data storage and deletion procedures.

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).
- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.
- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.
- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.
- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

IRB Institutional Official:

Maria-Claudia Tomanay

Dr. Mili Mathew
 Chair and Graduate Director
 Assistant Professor
 Communication Sciences and Disorders

**OFFICE
 USE
 ONLY**

Dr. Claudia Tomany
 Associate Provost for Research
 Dean of Graduate Studies

<p>SCSU IRB#: 2043 - 2657 1st Year Approval Date: 8/12/2021 1st Year Expiration Date:</p>	<p>Type: 8/13/2021 Exempt Review 2nd Year Approval Date: 2nd Year Expiration Date:</p> <p>Today's Date: 3rd Year Approval Date: 3rd Year Expiration Date:</p>
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SCSU